

Filmmakers' choices

Book

Published Version

Gibbs, J. (2015) Filmmakers' choices. Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism, Warwick, UK. (Republication in e-form) Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/52096/>

It is advisable to refer to the publisher's version if you intend to cite from the work. See [Guidance on citing](#).

Publisher: Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism

Publisher statement: Filmmakers' Choices is republished as a Movie ebook. These open access ebooks are available to download in epub and mobi formats. See <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/movie/ebooks/>

All outputs in CentAUR are protected by Intellectual Property Rights law, including copyright law. Copyright and IPR is retained by the creators or other copyright holders. Terms and conditions for use of this material are defined in the [End User Agreement](#).

www.reading.ac.uk/centaur

CentAUR

Central Archive at the University of Reading

Reading's research outputs online

FILMMAKERS' CHOICES

JOHN GIBBS



MOVIE
eBooks

Copyright

First published by Wallflower Press in *Close-Up 01* (2006).

This e-book edition is published in 2015 by

Movie: A Journal of Film Criticism

<http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/film/movie>

PDF designed by Elizabeth Johnston, 2020

Copyright © John Gibbs 2006, 2015

Acknowledgements (2005)

My first expression of gratitude is due to my colleagues in the Film and Television Division at the London College of Communication (LCC), part of the University of the Arts London, who have been extremely supportive during the writing of this project, and from whom I have learnt a great deal about the complex processes of filmmaking; the second is owed to the remarkable and resourceful students with whom we are lucky enough to work.

I am grateful to Wallflower press for recognising the potential of the *Close-Up* series, and creating a new home for detailed criticism. I am indebted to the LCC Research Fund for facilitating the research and writing of *Filmmakers' Choices*. Thank you to Murray Smith for inviting me to the University of Kent to give a paper around the material in chapter one of this study, to Aoife Monks for encouraging me to give a research seminar at the University of Reading, and to those who took part in the discussions on both occasions.

My thanks to Uncle William for some important initial inspiration, to Emma Ramsden for her insights into Benigno's case, to the members of the Quilting B for discussing another recent Almodóvar film – *Live Flesh* – and for stimulating conversation on other occasions. I would particularly like to thank Douglas Pye, not just for his expert editorial work, but for the pleasures and insights provided by working with him more generally. To my wife Rebecca I want to express my love and gratitude for her support during the writing – *Filmmakers' Choices* is dedicated to our daughter Morgan, who was born as it neared completion.

Contents

5 Introduction

7 Chapter 1

Choices and their consequences: a comparative analysis of decisions made in the realisation of *The Reckless Moment* (1949) and *The Deep End* (2001).

24 Chapter 2

Choices around generic conventions: *Unforgiven* (1992)

33 Chapter 3

Choices around narrative structure: Coincidences in *Lured* (1947)

45 Chapter 4

Looking, talking and understanding: subjectivity and point of view in *Talk to Her* (2002)

56 Chapter 5

What killed Ruthie Jean?: architectural design in *Candyman* (1992)

68 Notes

71 Bibliography

Introduction

Making a film involves a myriad of choices. Every frame, every cut, every element of performance and every note on the soundtrack results from pursuing one option and refusing many others. When investigating a film, a valuable approach is to identify a decision, or a group of decisions, and ask 'what is gained by doing it this way?' Of all the thousands of ways of opening this film, say, what are the consequences of the particular approach employed? To think in such terms is to consider the crux of the artistic process: the relationship between decisions taken and a work's meanings.

Placing emphasis on the detail of decisions made and their consequences is not novel. The kind of enquiry I am describing here is similar to what Stanley Cavell has called 'the critical question' – "Why is this as it is?" – 'which may be directed toward works of art as toward any of the acts and works of human beings and of their societies' (1979: 187). Cavell was writing in 'More of The World Viewed', an essay reflecting on responses to his extraordinary book, *The World Viewed*, and the question is bound up with his approach to human intentionality more generally. For Cavell 'every gesture of the camera may or may not mean something, and every cut and every rhythm of cuts, and every framing and every inflection within a frame – something determined by the nature of film and by the specific context in which the gesture occurs in a particular film' (1979: 186–7). By giving these gestures – these decisions – appropriate weight we discover what they might mean.

Another important and related point of reference is the writing of V. F. Perkins. All of Perkins' work is rooted in reflection on the significance of detailed decision-making but his short, relatively little known article, 'Moments of Choice' (1981), provided direct impetus for this study, and the *Close-Up* series more generally. 'Moments of Choice' examines examples of expressive choices in different aspects of film production. Moving from a discussion of décor into one of performance, this paragraph draws a generally applicable conclusion:

Physical aspects of production like décor and dress can help the actors to feel themselves into their roles. But the detail of performance that brings the characters to life – movement, gesture, intonation, rhythm – has to be established on set. Here the director's job is, particularly, to hold each and every moment of performance within a vision of the scene as a whole so that the impact and effectiveness of *today's* scene is not achieved at the expense of what was filmed last week or what remains to be shot. [...] The pacing of a scene may seem just right in itself, but how will it look when the audience reaches it halfway through the film? Directors work in the knowledge that nothing is right 'in itself' but only in relation to the developing design. Balance and proportion are crucial. (1981: 1143)

This passage shares with Cavell an emphasis on the importance of considering elements of a film, and different kinds of decision, in relation to one another. It also demonstrates an additional interest of Perkins' criticism – a belief that the complex and interacting decisions can imaginatively and usefully be engaged with from the perspective of the filmmakers. Shifting from the audience's side of the equation to the makers' reminds us that 'What is gained by doing it this way?' is just as valuable a question for artist as for critic, and that the artist, as Perkins remarks elsewhere, is always a work's first audience (1990: 64).

Unfortunately, these emphases have had a marginal presence in academic film studies. To date, many subjects in the field are well served with theoretical and contextual approaches, yet few are well provided with a substantive criticism that examines how and what films mean. *Close-Up* is conceived as a forum for detailed analysis – it will ask 'the critical question' of films from a variety of movements, periods, genres, directors and in relation to key concepts within the study of film and of television drama.

Filmmakers' Choices introduces the series by examining different areas of decision-making in a range of films. It begins with a comparison of two closely-related films, juxtaposing various decisions and considering their different effects, and then each chapter in the study examines a single film and a specific area of choice. In an earlier Wallflower Press book,

Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation (2002), I argued that it is very difficult to consider a single stylistic area of choice without making reference to others. This is because – as the passages quoted above imply – decisions in one area are complexly integrated with other elements, both within a moment and across the length of the film. For this reason, and because I was keen to bring a detailed approach to other areas with which filmmakers are engaged, this book is concerned with what might be called composite areas of decision-making: ones that themselves interact with and imply a range of other areas of choice.

Investigating composite decisions involves balancing broader perspectives with an engagement at the most detailed level of the films' organisation. So chapter four, which addresses point of view, examines the realisation of particular sequences in order to discuss the complex relationship to its action which *Talk to Her* (*Hable con Ella*, Pedro Almodóvar, 2002) invites its audience to adopt. Chapter two, which looks at choices made in relation to generic conventions, pursues its theme quite broadly across *Unforgiven* (Clint Eastwood, 1992), but it begins with a particular decision in the presentation of a group of characters and seeks out a pattern of related strategies. Chapter three engages with choices of narrative structure – and particularly the creative possibilities of coincidence – by moving between a close reading of a sequence from *Lured* (Douglas Sirk, 1947) and reflection on the design of the narrative more generally. In chapter five the focus is a decision in the architectural design of the film's world which has ramifications for a range of interconnected areas of choice, and which is central to the significance and achievement of *Candyman* (Bernard Rose, 1992). Chapter one approaches the complexity of interlocking decisions in another way: the chapter explores ten areas of choice in a comparison of *The Reckless Moment* (Max Ophuls, 1949) and its remake *The Deep End* (Scott McGehee & David Siegel, 2001).

The choices discussed in the following chapters resulted from the intersection of developing sets of intentions with the collaboration of actors and crew working together in particular times and at particular places, within certain material and financial constraints. Writing about decisions taken and others refused involves acknowledging that these decisions would

have been made in relation to the conventions of a historical time and place (both conventions of film form and those of broader social interaction). The filmmakers whose work is discussed will have made choices which were shaped by common assumptions of their day but, equally, may have been interested in challenging assumptions bound up in the conventions with which, and the traditions within which, they worked. The decisions explored here would sometimes have been made with a full sense of the extent of their implications and other times, and at other stages of what is a long and varied process, would have been made because they 'felt right'; artists of this calibre have the ability to be extraordinarily self-aware as well as to make decisions in the moment – and have found ways of working which enable effective movement between these states. That the guiding and coordinating role in making these choices would often have fallen to an individual – typically the director – is compatible with recognising that decisions emerge through the complex processes of collaboration that lie behind any movie.

1. Choices and their consequences: a comparative analysis of decisions made in the realisation of *The Reckless Moment* (1949) and *The Deep End* (2001).

One of the best ways of determining what has been gained by the decisions taken in the construction of an artwork is to imagine the consequences of changing a single element of the design. Taking the commutation test a step further – rather in the manner of the scientific practice of keeping as many elements in an experiment as possible constant, so as to notice more effectively the significance of the one varied – this chapter is going to compare two different attempts at telling same story.¹ Looking at a film and its remake – adaptations of an intelligent novel – here we will follow a different pattern from the other chapters in this study: rather than beginning with one decision (and one area of choice) and building discussion from there, this chapter will take advantage of the opportunity for comparison and look at range of differing decisions taken in original and remake.

When *The Deep End* (McGehee & Siegel, 2001) was released in cinemas it was presented not as a remake of *The Reckless Moment* (Max Ophuls, 1949) but purely as an adaptation of Elizabeth Sanxay Holding's book, *The Blank Wall* (1947).² According to Peter Matthews' review in *Sight and Sound*, the UK press pack did not even refer to the existence of the earlier movie. A brief comparison of the novel with the films tells a different story. To give two examples of many available: *The Deep End* follows *The Reckless Moment* in having the sympathetic blackmailer die as a result of losing control of a car on a corner while driving away from the family home with Nagle's body; in *The Blank Wall* Martin Donnelly is not involved in a car accident, but confesses to the police for the murders of Darby and Nagle, condemning himself to the electric chair.

At exactly the same point in both films, interrupting the first confrontation between the central character (Mrs Harper/Mrs Hall) and her daughter/son over the relationship with Darby, the mother receives a telephone call from her absent husband. In *The Deep End* this call is taken on the mobile extension in the son's bedroom, in *The Reckless Moment* telephone calls have to be received in the public space of the foot of the stairs, but in both films the conversation follows a similar turn, with daughter/son having a guarded conversation under the watchful eye of the mother, both complicit in keeping the real state of affairs from the absent father. In *The Blank Wall*, however, Mr Holley is fighting the second world war in the Pacific and can only communicate with the family by v-mail: both films have reason to change the technology, but the presence of two such similar scenes cannot be coincidence. On the basis of the evidence McGehee, Siegel and their collaborators need to be seen as remaking *The Reckless Moment* rather than simply adapting Holding's novel: in other words, their choices are not simply those of adaptation and invention, they involve decisions about whether or not to follow the approach of the earlier Columbia production.

The story of *The Blank Wall*, and both of the films, centres on a mother and housewife who, in the absence of her husband, has to bring her family through a complex crisis while meeting its considerable demands upon her. The novel is entirely told through the woman's consciousness. Neither film attempts this, but in each we are party to the mother's experiences much of the time, and both films are interested in vividly conveying the dilemmas she faces. However, our response to each is likely to be very different.

Découpage

A number of the reasons for this are concerned with broad decisions the respective filmmakers took about how to stage and capture this action, including choices in mise-en-scène, découpage, and editing.

The Reckless Moment is characterised by its use of long takes, long- or medium- shots and camera movement. It also gives us most of the action in long sequences which preserve strict temporal continuity. Consider, for example, the first sequence that

presents the life of the house, which begins with Lucia Harper (Joan Bennett) returning home, laden with shopping, from her trip to Los Angeles to confront Darby (Shepperd Strudwick). After the opening dissolve, she walks from the car to the mail box, as we watch from the other side of the trashcan, some foliage protruding into the frame between her and us. Having collected the mail she walks down the path to the house and weaves through the garage talking to her son David (David Blair); we pan to follow this movement, viewing Lucia over the car on which David is working.

David: Hey mother, how come you went up to Los Angeles this morning and didn't tell any of us?

Lucia: I had some things to attend to attend to.

David: I'm going to put on a new bumper, mother.

Lucia: I think you're too late, and put on your shirt, David.

In the second shot the camera is placed inside the house's utility room: we catch Lucia walking past the window outside, and then pan right to view her (through the windows which separate this space from the kitchen) as she enters the house. From this vantage point we see her talk to her father-in-law, Tom Harper (Henry O'Neill), who is in the depth of the frame, looking toward Lucia from the dining-room by means of a serving hatch.

Lucia: Hello Father, how's everything?

Tom: Why didn't you tell us you were going to LA this morning?

Lucia: I, uh, err, wanted to get to the store before the crowds.

Tom: Sybil, will you turn that vacuum cleaner off, I can't hear the race results...

As she goes through the door into the hall, the film cutting on her action, 'Father' quickly comes back into sight moving through the living room, which is divided from the dining room and the hall only by (open) screen doors. The camera cranes with Lucia as she passes Sybil (Frances Williams) vacuuming on the stairs, and then pans and tilts with Lucia, pausing momentarily outside Bee Harper's (Geraldine Brooks) door, and on to her own bedroom to confront Bee who is using

the shower.³ Of a sequence that lasts for five minutes and 15 seconds, and contains 28 shots, these three shots take up 51 seconds.

The sequence continues through the argument with Bee which begins in Lucia's room and then, after Bee has scolded Sybil from the landing, continues in Bee's room, the camera panning with Lucia's movement. Much of the argument is shown to us through the reverse field cutting of static shots – except when Lucia walks around Bee's room – and all of stationary shots in the sequence happen here. The argument over Darby is eventually interrupted by Lucia's husband Tom calling long distance, and we watch by means of another complex camera movement, this time travelling alongside Lucia on the landing and descending the stairs with her to the telephone at their foot. The shot continues after this movement for a further one minute and 25 seconds, until the end of the sequence, as the family respond in different ways to the telephone call. The long shot, long take is composed in some depth and Sybil's actions in the next room are revealed in the background. The action, and this last shot, continue as the family join in and then withdraw from Lucia's call.



All the camera movement in this sequence is motivated by Lucia's movements. As we pan, track or crane with Lucia through the house we are able to share her momentum,

perceive the ways she negotiates physical and social spaces, encounter the different members of the household with her, and are close enough to read the expressions on her face. All of this – coupled with the fact that we are aware of her recent encounter with Darby when the rest of the household, except Bee, are not, enabling us to perceive her difficulty in responding to their questions about her trip to Los Angeles – provides us with a powerful insight into her situation.

At the same time, the décor often intervenes between us and Lucia, the camera taking a slightly different path through the house. The film gives us a perspective on Lucia, surrounded by the objects of her world; the intervening elements between us and her tempering our involvement with simultaneous distance. Even in the static shots, such as those in the reverse-field-cut-conversation with Bee, there are almost always elements of the décor intruding between us and the characters: the doorframe and chest of drawers when Bee stands at the shower door, the writing table and the parcels Lucia has just bought in the reverse shot, the easel at which Bee is very deliberately sitting when Lucia follows her daughter into Bee's own room; one arm over the back of the chair, one foot resting on a cross support of the easel, Bee's assertion of bohemian sophistication undermined by a nervous biting of the nails of her left hand. In such ways we are presented with views of the characters within dramatically significant spaces.



Additionally, the film's first movement through the house initiates a network of motifs and interrelationships which will become more demanding and more oppressive as the film progresses. Elements are introduced that both establish the texture of family life and are integral to the film's thematic concerns: Lucia telling David to dress properly, the demands of the other members of the family make of her (only Sybil asks nothing of her in this sequence), her attempts to shape Bee's behaviour, the first of the telephone calls, the first and second of the two crane shots around the stairwell/hall, Sybil's complex position in relation to the family she works for, and so on. We also get the first use of the banisters in the hall to create an image of entrapment, something that gains its most powerful expression in the last moments of the film, but even here significantly impeding our view of Lucia.

We can see the development of these patterns by remarking briefly on the sequence when Lucia returns home to find Donnelly (James Mason) waiting to see her. This runs for seven and a half minutes and contains 26 shots, 13 of which are moving (I have not included small adjustments in this number, only pronounced movements of the camera, most of them tracking or crane shots). During this sequence the camera is in motion for half of the time, an extraordinary statistic for a sequence set within the confines of a by-no-means-enormous family home.

The continuity of action and the way that continuity is presented to us are vital here. The interaction of Donnelly with the family members who keep interrupting the conversation between victim and blackmailer, and Lucia's unsuccessful attempts to keep both separate, are made the more vivid because of the impression of continuity, achieved through a series of long takes which not only preserve real time for long periods but which also begin to imply connections between the elements that they contain. The long takes in *The Reckless Moment* add to the awkward intermingling that Lucia is powerless to prevent taking place between Donnelly and her family.⁴

In contrast *The Deep End's* general approach is to realise its sequences through the reverse-field cutting of close-ups, either showing us one actor in frame at a time or in an over-shoulder shot where we can only see the back of the other character. The scale of these shots is usually head and shoulders; sometimes the face fills the height of the screen, occasionally a view will

show a character down as far as their waist. (There are some shots in the film when we see the full figure of the actors but they are infrequent and fleeting, especially during conversations.) As these shots are close-ups, and are shot on standard or long lenses, our view of the background is restricted and tends to be out of focus.

Although this is a widescreen image, the framing is such that we get very little sense of the behaviour of characters in relationship to one another in these sequences. The film focuses our attention on the facial expressions of one character at a time, rather than provide us a view which reveals both – a very deliberate step when a widescreen frame can so readily contain two actors simultaneously. Rather than the sense of how these people interrupt and interrelate with each other which is achieved in *The Reckless Moment*, the cumulative effect of these decisions in *The Deep End* is to abstract the characters from their environment, and from each other.

Comparing the number of shots in the respective sequences also makes a revealing comparison. In the scenes when Margaret Hall (Tilda Swinton) returns home and confronts Beau Hall (Jonathan Tucker) there are 61 shots in five minutes. As we saw, the equivalent action in *The Reckless Moment*

takes a similar time, but contains 28 shots. The introduction of Alek Spera (Goran Visnjic, the sympathetic blackmailer of the remake) contains 105 shots and lasts seven minutes and 50 seconds approximately; the introduction of Martin Donnelly is seven and a half minutes long, and is comprised of only 26 shots. It would appear from the statistics that *The Deep End* eschews not only the long shot but the long take as well.

Instead, the decisions in *The Deep End* create a picture of Margaret in relation to her family where the tenor is of separation and disjunction. Where camera movement in *The Reckless Moment* connected, here the editing separates. In addition, where Joan Bennett's Lucia is almost always on the move, Tilda Swinton's Margaret, in this sequence and in the film more generally, is frequently stationary, sometimes stunned into repose. One of the defining images of Margaret in this sequence is her dismayed response to the news, imparted by her departing daughter Paige (Tamara Hope), that Beau 'took off in the boat, mad about something', viewed through the panes and woodwork of a door, and held for four seconds after Paige has left the frame.

Another important difference is that rather than creating the illusion of continuous time, as its predecessor does, *The*



Deep End frequently abbreviates time, eliding parts of the action through cutting or dissolves. These jumps through time and space are often accompanied with a sound bridge. In the equivalent sequence to Lucia's returning home, *The Deep End* gives us four sequences, and five distinct periods of time – and this total includes, as one period, Margaret's flashbacks to Beau's car accident which are shown to us as she sits by the lake. Similarly, the equivalent scene to the introduction of Donnelly, the arrival of Alek Spera, is split into five distinct units of time and space: by a dissolve between Beau reading of Darby's death and his confronting Margaret, by the raucous cut to the computer fishing game, by the cut to the aquarium in the living room and by another small elision from the awkward conversation between Margaret, Alek and Jack (Peter Donat) to Alek and Margaret's further conversation outside the door of the house.

From this description one might imagine these short, often jarringly cut-together sequences make vivid a day in which demanding activities pile one on top of the other. However, the effect achieved is quite the opposite. Each of these breaks in continuity lessens the cumulative impact; the pressure is not allowed to build as it is in Ophuls' film, but dissipated. As well as the general effect, there are also specific occasions when the elisions let the characters and audience off the hook: the last break in Alek's first appearance gets Margaret out of the embarrassing encounter between herself, Alek and Jack. Jack's question – 'Spera? From the air station?' – is left hanging and we do not have to watch Margaret and Alek complicitly manoeuvre themselves outside.

There is some camera movement in these conversations in *The Deep End*, primarily adjustments in framing to accommodate such movements as the actors make. There are only two occasions, in the first scene in the house, when the camera tracks to evoke a character's movement: a three second shot following Margaret, and another of the same length accompanying Paige, Margaret's daughter. More typically, if the camera tracks or cranes, the character is stationary and the camera moves, often in a slow, encircling motion.

A camera movement not motivated by the action of a character begins the part of Alek's introduction when he and Margaret encounter Jack, facilitating one of the many watery

compositions in the film, with the aquarium filling half the frame before the camera tracks right to show Margaret and Alek entering the living room from the study. Unlike the intrusion of décor in *The Reckless Moment* which always happens when the camera is following the action, this is a camera movement and an inclusion of décor existing solely in order to create the image: there is no other reason to have the aquarium in the foreground at the start of the shot, and no reason to move the camera other than to remove it from view. More generally, the camera and character movement in these sequences does not attempt to create the sense of flow through the house that characterises the corresponding sequences in the earlier film.

Characters and their environment

The Deep End makes full use of the beauties of its location. The dawn of the second and third days are marked by views of the boathouse with the lake, the mountains, and dramatic cloudscape in the background. We see another of these shots at the beginning of the sequence when Margaret sits by the shore and thinks about Beau's accident, in the sequence of her return home. Even when the characters are engaged in distressing situations, we are always aware of the beauty within which the Hall family live, the size of their garden, the vista from the foreshore. Rhythmically, the shots of the boathouse even act a little like the transitional shots of an Ozu film, creating space for reflection or (in Paul Schrader's view, at least) an opportunity to register the transcendent qualities of a world beyond an individual family's problems. As this comparison suggests, however, the effect of these views is to dissipate the intensity of the drama. Every time we get one of those achingly beautiful images it makes us relax, and marvel at how fortunate Margaret is.

Helicopter shots also figure significantly in this pattern of landscape images. When the characters are travelling (and even as Margaret sails up the lake with Darby's body) the film will suddenly adopt a massive vantage point to view the car or boat within the enormity of the landscape. These perspectives have the effect of reducing the scale of the problems which the film is in other ways asking us to consider important. The emphasis on the grandeur of the landscape suggests the impermanence



of the human characters, their insignificance in the face of nature. When all the problems of Margaret and her family are long forgotten, these mountains, this ice cold water will endure. Such strategies have the potential to offer significant perspectives on a family's dilemmas but here they seem to contradict rather than complement the film's attempt to involve us in the drama. Instead of adding a meaningful dimension to the film's overall systems of point of view they become distractions.

Balboa, too, is an attractive place to live, but it is not presented in *The Reckless Moment* in a way to foreground this – not, anyway, after the opening shots. It becomes a raw, bleached, *overexposed* place. The tracking shots in the garden, sharing some of the same features as those indoors, help to make the immediate surroundings of the Harper house an extension of it. At night it becomes more threatening as the elements of noirish Los Angeles journey with Darby, Donnelly and Nagle to Balboa. In *The Reckless Moment* we find the family home and its surroundings an oppressive place; in *The Deep End* we want to live there.

Character and Action

If cutting away to the overarching perspective or making the most of the location when it is not in the interests of dramatic intensity to do so might be considered evidence of a less than rigorous approach to the construction of point of view, so might some of the other choices made around access to the characters in *The Deep End*.

In *The Reckless Moment* we get to know Donnelly through his interaction with the family. In his first sequence there is only one view of him in the absence of the other characters,



a two-second shot which comes after he has told Lucia that he can wait while she talks to her daughter and the two have left the room, in which he shifts his weight from one foot to the other and glances to his left. It is a subtle performance element which suggests an awkwardness not apparent from the way he behaves toward the family, captured in a brief long shot in the middle of a complicated sequence: telling, but not overstated. There are other occasions when we get to watch Donnelly's changing relationship to Lucia and the family, but they are all moments when he is interacting with family members, or others (such as the shopkeeper at the drugstore, or Nagle his partner).

The Deep End takes a different approach to making believable and apparent the blackmailer's change of heart. In his first scene Goran Visnjic plays the character edgily and without any suggestion of compassion, although Alek does not look like he is comfortable with what he has to do. There is nothing of the gentleness that begins to emerge from Martin Donnelly, even in his first appearance, in the way he talks to Father and David. Rather than the trip to the drugstore and the extended conversations that Lucia and Donnelly share on their second encounter, when Alek Spera arrives at the house after Margaret has failed to make their rendezvous, he helps revive old Mr Hall who has fallen to the floor with some form of heart attack.

When the ambulance has carried away the patient, Margaret and Dylan (Margaret's youngest child, who does not correspond to any of the characters in the other stories), Alek is left in the driveway. He walks slowly back toward the house and, in a series of 11 shots, we see him wander around the living room and kitchen, examine a family photograph, even open the oven and contemplate the joint inside. The sequence ends with Beau returning home. On being challenged about what he is doing, Alek looks sheepish and says he was just going.

Having refused some of the ways that the earlier film gradually let the blackmailer get to know the family, *The Deep End* has him save the life of Margaret's father-in-law – an emphatic method of drawing from him behaviour which moves him out of his professional role and making him share an emotive experience with Margaret. Yet the subsequent sequence alone in the family home seems a very laboured way of trying to convey Alek's changing view of Margaret and her situation. Equally, staying with the blackmailer here seems false to the spirit and logic of the drama: if we are really engaged with Margaret's experience, surely we need to follow the journey with Grandfather to the emergency room, not potter around in the kitchen with Alek. Where *The Reckless Moment* gives us Donnelly's change of heart through complexly dramatised action which is simultaneously achieving other objectives, *The Deep End* gives us two minutes of business that exists solely to make plain Alek's changing feelings. This discrepancy between means and ends leaves Visnjic with an unenviable acting challenge.

In Ophuls' film, too, there are moments when we follow Donnelly rather than go with Lucia: the first of these, excepting the brief shot in the middle of the sequence of his first appearance and that we watch him walk into the night after Lucia has already gone inside, is the next morning when he assists David with the horn on the car. Then, in the drugstore scene, when Lucia is in the callbox, we accompany Donnelly and witness the purchase of the cigarette holder, even sharing his optical point of view in a shot of the gift of which Lucia will remain entirely ignorant. There are two other major departures from Lucia's experience. The first is the occasion when Donnelly telephones Lucia, where, once we have cut to Donnelly, we stay with him for the rest of the telephone call; this leads into the long take where he walks through the foyer of the hotel

up to the counter where he has the conversation with Nagle. The second is after Donnelly has said goodbye to Lucia at the bus depot, having told her that she should now forget about the whole affair (someone else has been arrested for the murder); the camera stays with him tracking with him through two complex movements as he searches the hotel foyer and bar for Nagle. Soon after this, we are privileged over Lucia and Nagle in witnessing Donnelly's arrival at the house, and accompany him as he strides toward the boat house and Lucia's aid. Finally, we witness his attempts to remove the letters from Nagle's dead body and the resulting car crash.

All of these moments involve interaction with other characters and are part of ongoing action. We do not need a separate sequence of Donnelly exploring the house to show his feelings. We can accept Donnelly having a generous side because we have already seen hints of it in his relations with Lucia's family: the way he talks to Mr Harper (even giving him racing tips), the way he accepts the generous welcome of David, that he is prepared to wait while Lucia consoles her daughter. When Alek enters the house, he encounters some of the members of the family – Paige, Jack, and Dylan – but he does not interact with any of them, whereas in *The Reckless Moment* we can see Donnelly getting to know and appreciate the family, and appreciate their demands on Lucia.

Not cutting away from Donnelly during the telephone call

Let us take a look at one of these moments in more detail: the telephone call Donnelly makes to Lucia. The call interrupts a passage of action taking place at the house, but once the film cuts to Donnelly at the other end of the line it stays with him, the scale of shot changing to a close-up part-way through the conversation. In his excellent production history of *The Reckless Moment*, which forms part of *Max Ophuls in the Hollywood Studios*, Lutz Bacher records the prolonged resistance which Ophuls put up to pressure from B. B. Kahane, production vice-president at Columbia, to shoot footage of Lucia to intercut during this phone call (1996: 287, 311). Clearly, this was a very important point for the director. *The*

Deep End, by contrast, cuts between Alek and Margaret during their telephone conversation.

What was gained in Ophuls' version? Why was he so ready to fight for the decision he had made? Donnelly is wearing a light jacket, in contrast to the dark overcoat which he has worn on all his previous appearances in the movie, and is standing in a well-lit telephone booth which fills the screen. At the point where Donnelly moves the conversation away from the urgency of Nagle's demands for the money and onto the fact that he is not going to ask for his own share, the film cuts from a medium close-up to the close-up, filling the screen with Mason's head and offering us a three-quarter profile view of his face.⁵ At this point, too, quietly plangent music comes in on the soundtrack, which plays on until it fades out halfway through the next shot, when Nagle begins to speak. Not only do we not see Lucia, we do not hear her voice on the other end of the line.

I understand you can't talk. Look, now. I just called to tell you that he won't wait till Wednesday, he wants the money no later than Monday. And there is a Nagle, I'm afraid there's very much a Nagle. [Pause] You don't believe me. [Cut] Listen to me. Listen. If you can get half of it? You don't have to raise... I already told Nagle I wouldn't be wanting my share. And I want you to know, too, that if I had the money I'd pay him off and that would be the end of it. [Pause] Are you there? [Pause] Did you hear what I said? [Pause] I wish you would believe me. I wish things could have been different in many ways. Only one good thing came of it — I met you. [Pause] Which way do you come into town? I'll meet you at the terminal.

Donnelly stands close to the receiver, speaking quietly but passionately. Because we can only hear one half of the conversation it almost becomes a monologue, almost a soliloquy. We might think, as Donnelly momentarily does, that Lucia has hung up, as he goes on to say things he would be much less likely say in person. If this seems fanciful, it is more prosaically the case that not cutting back to Lucia focuses all our attention on what Donnelly says, how he says it, and what it means to him.

He has separated himself from his surroundings in making this telephone call, and the telephone box is framed on its own,

without giving us broader introduction to the space in which it is placed. We can see him unobserved by anyone else, and (after the cut) in an intimate view not equalled by any other shot of him in the film, even the close-up after the car crash, which is of a similar scale but which does not give us as clear a view of his face. The receiver links him to a sphere where he is increasingly keen to act differently to the ways in which he has become accustomed, and to which his energy is increasingly directed. (Contrast his delicate animation here with the way he talks to others in the following shot). These elements contribute to evoking something of the sense of the confessional.



Above all, not cutting to Lucia, in conjunction with some of the other decisions described here, makes available to us a perspective that Donnelly is working out his own emotions, rather than fully communicating with another person who has different priorities. His extravagant claims — 'one good thing came of it — I met you' — are spoken into the ether, although we can conclude from the return of the conversation to practicalities, that this sentiment was not reciprocated. This sense that he is projecting qualities onto Lucia which may be rooted more in what she represents to him than in any objective reality, contributes to an important element of the film's portrayal of Donnelly. It connects to other elements of his characterisation and behaviour, evident in his romantic notions about Lucia's

maternal role (Donnelly: 'She's lucky to have a mother like you.' Lucia: 'Everyone has a mother like me, you probably had one too.'). his recollections of his own mother's desire to for him to be a priest and his ultimate self-sacrifice for Lucia and her family. The decisions made here, with the determination not to cut back to the house in Balboa at their centre, relate complexly to some of the key trajectories and interests of the film, which have been explored further by critics such as Andrew Britton (1976).

Revealing Nagle

At the end of the conversation Donnelly puts the telephone down, leaves the intimate space of the booth and walks through the very public foyer of the Midtown Hotel. Now the surroundings which have been withheld from us become all too apparent. A complex, tracking, long take follows him as he walks through the space, and a series of objects (two lampshades, a sofa, two pillars) and people (a man who asks where the game is tonight, to which he replies 'I don't know, I'm not playing') intervene between him and us. This shot, together with two as he searches for Nagle later in the film, offer a presentation of Donnelly within his environment which answers the ones of Lucia in hers.⁶ The parallel that Donnelly makes between her relationship to her family and his to Nagle, angrily rejected by Lucia in the ferry scene, is supported by the film in this sense of their mutual constraint.⁷

Several of the areas of significance introduced during the telephone call are developed, in some instances by means of contrast, in the shot that follows. Donnelly picks up his dark overcoat as he walks through the foyer. He walks up to a counter at the opposite end of the space from the telephone booth, and leans against it next to another man, also dressed in dark clothes. Nagle (for it is he) says, 'Tell him the game will be held in room 420 tonight', and then, 'Talk to Her?'

Donnelly: Yes.

Nagle: She'll have the money Monday?

Donnelly: She'll try.

Nagle: What d'you give me that 'she'll try' business for? I told you what to tell her, let's cut out the horsing around. Maybe I'd better go down there and talk to her?

Donnelly: I'm handling this. You lay off. You're not going near her.

Nagle: I'm not, huh?

Donnelly: No you're not.

Nagle: You know this lady's not in your class, Martin. I often think you get mad at me because I remind you of what you are. You're not respectable, Martin. Relax, take it easy.



During this conversation we can see Nagle behind Donnelly. Nagle is standing straight and Donnelly leaning forward on the counter, so when Nagle speaks it is from the back of Donnelly's head. During the conversation, Donnelly never turns to look at Nagle, although he does incline himself more in his partner's direction when he becomes more heated.

This is the first time we have met Nagle in the film, and there has been repeated speculation as to whether he actually exists. Lucia has on more than one occasion accused Donnelly of inventing his partner – in the manner of Smallweed in *Bleak House* (1852-53) – and Donnelly has protested strongly that he does exist, and that she really does not want to deal with him: 'There is a Nagle, I give you my word', was the line with which

the ferry scene concluded; the first part of the phone call continued this trajectory.

The staging of this sequence plays further with the status of Nagel, not perhaps as a figment of Donnelly's imagination but as an aspect of himself which he is keen to disavow. The way in which Donnelly does not need to acknowledge his partner intimates a close relationship of longstanding; the way in which Nagle's voice comes from behind Donnelly's head suggests an internal voice. Certainly, Nagel claims kinship with Donnelly, and a damning connection with him. A moment ago we had Donnelly's confession, now we meet his bad conscience.

The Deep End, by contrast, makes it clear that Nagle is a real person from Alek's very first appearance: at the end of the scene Margaret can see him standing by a car in her driveway making calls on his cellphone. Not only does the decision to reveal him on this occasion prevent the film from developing any of the possibilities exploited by Ophuls, but having Margaret (and the audience) uncertain of Nagle's veracity would be a useful element for the exchanges between the two characters even if it had no additional metaphorical weight.⁸ Certainly, nothing is gained by having him show himself, neither does it seem true to character to have him travel all the way out to Tahoe and wait around by the car for his partner to conduct their business.

Making Bee into Beau

Some major changes to the family in *The Deep End* may have been designed to give the film a contemporary feel. In *The Deep End* it is a young daughter, Paige, who is handy with cars, rather than *The Reckless Moment's* David. The elder sibling has also undergone a change of sex, and a change of sexuality. In *The Deep End*, it is not Bee, Lucia's daughter who has been involved with Ted Darby but Beau, Margaret's son, who has been having an affair with Darby Reese. An immediate problem with which this decision presents the film is a series of representational pitfalls around predatory gay men. Darby Reese is loathsome, and the film does not make much of an attempt to distinguish between Margaret's concern at her son's sexuality and her concern at the circles in which he has found himself moving. The film moves toward restoring Beau's innocence (he never learns about his mother's efforts to safeguard

his liberty and reputation) and he finally becomes a supportive, but desexualised, son.

More crucially, in making the change the film loses the opportunity for play on the relationship between Mother and Daughter which is so significant, in differing ways, in the novel and the 1949 film. In *The Blank Wall*, Bee initially defines herself in opposition to the domestic role in which she sees Lucia; their relationship also forms part of a broader structure of parental/child relationships – in Holding's novel the grandparent about the house is Lucia's father, rather than her father-in-law. *The Reckless Moment* is also interested in Bee's rejection of the role of wife and mother, although, as critics have pointed out, one of the elements that contribute to the bleak 'happy' ending of the film is that events and Lucia have succeeded in re-making the rebellious art-student in Lucia's own image, wearing the fur coat, and going out to the pictures with the boy next door. David, too, has finally been encouraged to dress properly, a sign of his socialisation. By making Bee into Beau, *The Deep End* has ruled out any possibility of developing this theme.

The easel (and the world of the art school which Bee aspires to, and which has drawn her into contact with Darby) works very differently to the music practice which *The Deep End* substitutes, and not just because it enables Bee to take a defiant and knowing pose during her conversation with her mother, where music practice is a way for Beau to escape his mother that has to be abandoned once she comes into the room. Their chosen pursuits shape the characters in particular directions: Bee is condescendingly combative to her mother, albeit naively so; Beau is always lip-tremblingly on the defensive to his, with whom he refuses to discuss his sexuality. Beau's practice, and later the tape he needs to record in order to get into Wesleyan, embody for *The Deep End* the academic future which Margaret must protect from the association with Darby. These are highly respectable activities which any middle class parent would be proud of: Beau does not play Jazz in a shady bar, he plays mournful classical solos. Where for Bee, art school is (at the beginning) her route out of Balboa and her mother's lifestyle, Beau's music is the route toward a university future that is not offered as a promising time and space for self-definition – the dynamic of its presentation is all about how a threat to his respectability might jeopardise his place. Bee's engagement

with art school is her attempt at non-conformity, Beau's music scholarship must not be jeopardised by his.

What *The Deep End* constructs instead of the regeneration of Lucia in *Bee* is a more developed parallel between the sexual repression of Margaret and of Beau. In both films, the child's encounter with their lover in the boathouse, and the mother's attempt to suppress the bodily evidence, is answered later in the story. Firstly, by the appearance of the blackmailer in the family home, threatening exposure, who then develops a relationship, of sorts, with the mother. Secondly, by an answering scene in the boathouse, between the mother and the blackmailers, on both occasions the death of Nagle prompting Lucia and Margaret to offer to go to the police – in effect to make public everything they have been attempting to bury for the sake of the family: the child's involvement with Darby, the disposal of his body, their own entanglement with Donnelly/Spera. These elements (with the exception of the offer to go to the police) are inventions of Holding's novel, as is the extension of the respectability/repressed motif to the relationship between small town and city.⁹ In *The Deep End*, the parallel between mother and child's tentative movement outside of family-sanctioned forms of affection is taken further. Both Beau and Margaret are slapped across the face in the boathouse (by Darby and Nagle respectively), the injuries being commented on by the other. More significantly, each has a role in effecting the other's repression: Margaret by trying to protect her son from Darby and Beau by his disapproval at what he takes to be an affair between his mother and Alek (Margaret: 'It's not what you think.' Beau: 'How do you know what I think?'). Then the family's irregularity which came to light with Beau's car accident is concealed again by Alek's. In the final scene in the bedroom there is a rapprochement, with a restating of filial and maternal affection, but Margaret is in tears and Beau now deliberate in his innocence: 'I don't need to know. It's not important.' Mother and son are returned to a repressed state – mutually supporting but defined by an ongoing breakdown of communication and a refusal to acknowledge their experiences. This emphasis of *The Deep End* is not served, however, by the film's attempts to dramatise Margaret's repression more generally, as will be argued in the course of examining the next area of choice.

The change of period

The Reckless Moment is a film concerned with what a middle class wife and mother cannot do, or has difficulty doing. Lucia is constrained on every side by the demands of her role in relation to the family, yet has no financial independence of her husband – her unsuccessful movement from bank to loan company to pawnbrokers is a vital and complexly realised part of the movie, as Robin Wood (1976) and Andrew Britton (1976) have eloquently discussed. This is a film which is concerned with exploring the limitations on movement and behaviour for a woman in the society it presents.

Where Lucia has to dispose of Darby while wearing a full-length overcoat and scarf, Margaret Hall is already wearing tennis shoes, trousers and a waxed jacket when she finds the late Darby Reese. In *The Deep End* Margaret's inability to raise the money (which has been inflated by ten times in the intervening years) is more of the order of an inconvenience than a reflection of her disenfranchisement: it is because her husband is the *co-signatory* on the mortgage that she cannot raise any money on it, and her attempts to secure a loan seem to be damaged more by the lack of time available rather than anything else.

Second-wave feminism should have had some kind of influence on Margaret's understanding of her social situation. Indeed, she marshals a list of her domestic duties as ammunition in the conversation when Alek accuses her of not trying hard enough to raise the money. In the equivalent conversation in *The Reckless Moment*, Lucia talks not of her own labour – I am not sure she would describe what she does in these terms – but David's summer work selling hamburgers. When Donnelly responds by asking her if she ever gets away from her family, she looks up sharply, clearly taken aback.

Much of *The Reckless Moment's* power comes from the convincing way in which it dramatises the *process* by which Lucia develops a perspective on her entrapment within the family. In moments like this, building on the foundations provided by the earlier scenes in the house, the film encourages us to see the two kinds of pressure on Lucia in awkward relationship, and to make vivid for us one of the main structures and interests of the film – that it is through the experience of blackmail, and

her interaction with Donnelly, that Lucia comes to see the limitations of her role as wife and mother. However, when Alek, in *The Deep End*, asks Margaret the same question, the fact that she has just listed all of her domestic chores makes nonsense of her shocked reaction.

Margaret's response to this question is one of the weakest moments of characterisation and performance in the film; characterisation because of the illogicality just discussed, performance not least because Swinton's reaction is caught in close-up, whereas Bennett's is captured in an ongoing wider

shot which includes both her and Mason, and in which her sharp glance and turn of the head is significant but not insisted upon by the emphasis that a closer shot would have provided. Moreover, Bennett is looking in front of her when the question is posed, and then looks across at Mason, *away* from the camera; Swinton is already looking past the camera (toward Alek in the world constructed by the reverse field cutting, but narrowly off-screen right for the spectator) and this is held for 3 seconds, as we see the movement of her eyelids and the quiver of her lip, before she turns to look away.





Having Margaret tell Alek about her domestic tasks actually has the effect of diminishing their weight and importance; *experiencing* the family's demands is so much more effective than hearing them listed. Attempts to show the audience the domestic pressures on Margaret are further undermined by the fact that she spends several moments in the early part of the film sitting around. In the sequence of her returning home, we saw her on the bench by the dock thinking about Beau's accident – after one of the shots of the boathouse with a cloudscape over the lake, to compound matters – and then doing the crossword while waiting for him to come home. Lucia is always on the move, except when the rest of the house has gone to bed, when she does the accounts or writes to her husband.

As so often, the decisions taken in one area have consequences in others. Changing the period without really engaging with the effect of changing social perceptions also causes a problem for *The Deep End* in the way we are likely to respond to the members of the family. As a result of his complaints about broken remote controls and dry cleaning, and his expectations of being served lunch at the time of his own convenience, Jack, the father-in-law, comes across as a selfish curmudgeon. More damagingly, Margaret's acceptance of this behaviour, offering to bring the lunch up to him in his room, renders her cowed and feeble. The father-in-law in *The Reckless Moment* is also demanding and impotent, and does not distinguish himself in the way he behaves toward Sybil, but he has redeeming features. There is the touching moment when he offers to help Lucia – replaced in the later film by the scene where Jack lends Margaret \$80 – and if he is too easily satisfied by Lucia's response, his latter-day counterpart is entirely unable to perceive anything wrong. Typically of Ophuls' film, one can

see the ways in which Lucia's relationship to the family might be sensibly compared by Donnelly to his with Nagle, and yet can see something of value within the people who make up that family.

The Deep End does not create an impression of the family as an integrated and complex set of human relationships. In fact, we never see them all together. You believe that Margaret cares for the individuals and for the future prospects of her son, but the sense of the family as living entity, something the mother celebrates and makes sacrifices for, is quite absent here.

A change of season and location

The Reckless Moment changed the time of year when *The Blank Wall* is set from early May to Christmas. Christmas is intimately associated with the notion of the family, in its origins and in the way the festival is celebrated today. Setting the film in mid-December adds another level of pressure on Lucia: not least as the audience understands that the approach of Christmas piles a higher than average burden of work, expense and expectation on Lucia. Her husband's absence is accentuated by the time of year. Connected to this is the blue Christmas tree which has been offered to the absent husband and Father as the only problem that the family has to deal with in his absence, and covers the family's real predicaments with its symbolic growth.

The Deep End moves the time of year in which the story is set away from Christmas, perhaps because the decision to move the location to Lake Tahoe had already been made, and the weather conditions would not be suitable for the story's action. Lake Tahoe and Reno provide the requisite opposition between city and small town which is important to the earlier versions of the story (New York and a coastal town in the novel, Los Angeles and Balboa in *The Reckless Moment*). However, just as *The Deep End* does not effectively evoke the sense of the family as an entity, it never provides us with the sense of community that the others provide. (For a film which mostly takes place in the home or the city, *The Reckless Moment* very effectively evokes the small town through the drugstore scene, the post office and a handful of neighbours.)

No Sibyl

The most perceptive, and most sympathetic, person living in the Harper house is Sybil. She has no equivalent in *The Deep End*, despite being one of the most important characters in the original film and the novel.¹⁰ This decision may have resulted from practicalities: not many people have maids these days, and if they do that might be a bar to our readiness to sympathise with them. Andrew Britton's article in *Framework* is particularly strong on this aspect of *The Reckless Moment's* complexity.

The character of Sybil is beautifully used in the film, the relationship with Mrs. Harper gradually built up until, by the end, the outsider by race and status is the only member of the household with whom Mrs Harper can make open contact. [...] The other members of the family either ignore Sybil, take her for granted, or treat her as an inferior: consider old Mr. Harper's irritable 'Sybil, you *know* I drink tea,' or Bea's petulant anger when, trying to escape from the row with her mother, she finds that Sybil hasn't ironed her dress yet, to which Mrs. Harper responds, 'You're not to talk like that to Sybil.' (One should note here the deeper complexity established by our awareness that Bea's 'repression' of Sybil – treating her as a slave – is a direct response to her mother's attempt to repress *her* – treating her as a child.)

Ophuls makes use of two devices to indicate Sybil's deep concern for the attachment to the family – specifically, to Mrs. Harper. (1) The exploitation of long-take, deep-focus shots with a family group in the foreground, and Sybil watching and/or listening anxiously in the middle distance, as in the first telephone conversation with Mr. Harper, and the conference between Mrs. Harper and Bea in the kitchen during Donnelly's visit. (2) Sybil's demand if she can be of any help runs like a leitmotiv through the film. Mrs Harper constantly refuses it until the final sequence, which is introduced and interspersed by renewed offers of aid ('Would you like me to go with you? ... You call me if you need me... You'd better take your coat'), the total unselfishness and generosity thrown into relief by their polar opposite in Nagel's total self-interest ('I don't care about your daughter, your son, your husband or anybody else'). (1976: 23–4)

Britton does not point out, though it only strengthens his argument, that Father's line to Sybil is actually provoked by Sybil deliberately offering Mr Harper coffee in order to distract his attention from the awkward questions he is asking Lucia. To lose Sybil cuts out one of the story's major axes.

Conclusion

One conclusion that might be drawn from this discussion concerns the benefits of consistent patterns of decision-making. The full significance of the way Lucia moves through the house is achieved through the cumulative weight of the decisions, employed systematically as well as in a way which is true to the particular moments involved. The number of times we see Lucia get home to discover something unpleasant – the argument with Bee, Donnelly's visit, the recent departure of the police, Nagle – helps articulate the draining weight of the experience. The final movement through the house, the shadows and substance of the banisters oppressive as she descends the stairs to the telephone, gains force from our recollection earlier movements and earlier phone calls; the desperation of the situation is compounded by the return of Bee and David in their new respectable attire, completing motifs which have been developing since we first saw Lucia at home.

The Deep End is consistent in its use of close-ups, as discussed earlier, but it therefore does not benefit from the emphasis of the occasional and carefully selected close-up. (Its extreme long shots, although used less frequently, have, as argued above, rather unexpected consequences.) Moreover, the film's attempts to establish motifs seem pedestrian, particularly the use of watery and/or blue imagery: the shots of aquariums, the ostentatious CGI water droplet hanging from the kitchen tap which begins one sequence. Here consistent becomes over-insistent; because these images are so assertively and so indiscriminately deployed they lose any potential significance.

One moment in *The Deep End's* patterning of colour which does pay off is when Margaret, having disposed of Darby's body, and belatedly got the children off to school, notices for the first time Darby's car. It is a metallic blue corvette, with a suggestive number plate (6FT BLO, decorated with tags

advertising Darby's eponymous night club: *The Deep End* – 'take the plunge'). This is not only a glaringly incriminating piece of evidence at the end of the drive, it also embodies everything about Darby which Margaret would rather not think about in relation to Beau. It is thrusting, conspicuous, lewd, designed for wasteful pleasure. After she has retrieved the keys from Darby's body in the lake, the car blasts dance music when she turns the ignition.

This success comes early in the film, before the pattern has become overdone and, importantly, in a context where there are good dramatic reasons for making the car blue. Having established the colour firmly in the nightclub scene, reintroduced it in the boathouse and during the disposal of the body, these associations are recaptured for us, pertinently. But the general shoe-horning of aquariums, sharks on television and so on, into scenes, damages the motif both by their imprecision and the clumsiness with which they are levered into the movie. (Beau's bedroom is also predominantly blue, which seems fair enough, but so is Dylan's bedroom, Jack's bedclothes, Margaret's computer monitor when she writes email and the studio where Beau records for his music scholarship. The sequence after the credits begins with an extreme close-up of the water and gravel in Dylan's aquarium. All of these elements blur the motif.)

The decisions around the car do not have the assertive quality of so much of the motif because the symbolism is integrated in the action: it is logical that Darby would have driven over from Reno, and this is convincingly the kind of car he would drive. The tags on the number plate almost damage the effect by overplaying it, but with their exception the film creates an image that might be described by T.S. Eliot as an 'objective correlative', were he into this kind of thing, or by V. F. Perkins as a balance between action and image. Little in the rest of the movie would.

Another related characteristic which prevents *The Deep End* from being more effective is its inability to do more than one thing at a time. The scene with Alek home alone stands out because it exists for a single purpose. *The Deep End* finds the need to have scenes where Margaret sits introspectively, more than once with the assistance of flashbacks, or is shocked stationary in order to reveal her anxieties. The image of her held through the panes of the door actually follows a perfectly

effective image earlier in the course of the same shot. While Paige is talking to her mother and before she has closed the door and left the frame, the shot presents us with a fragmented view of Margaret, separated from her daughter by the door frame, and constrained within a pane of the window. This lasts for a good five seconds before the door closes, and gives us plenty of time to consider the suggestive potential of the image while comprehending the conversation and watching Margaret's reactions. If the shot had cut as the door closed, it would have enhanced the sense of separation and would not have obliged us to contemplate bewildered Margaret for a further four seconds. Similarly, to move the camera around a character who is stationary, as opposed to a camera movement which is motivated by the movement of the character which has other effects at the same time, is a gesture which claims a lot of attention, and needs an appropriately significant conjunction of context and content to seem justified.



Again comparison favours *The Reckless Moment*, in which so many things are being achieved simultaneously so much of the time. I partly want to claim this for the extraordinary economy of the classical form, but the dramatic fluidity of *The Reckless Moment* takes things to a further degree. There is some fascinating material in *Max Ophuls in the Hollywood Studios* which makes clear how atypical was Ophuls' way of proceeding, largely disregarding the previously agreed shooting script, which promised a treatment based much more on analytical editing, and records the on-set efficiency and subtle negotiations with which Ophuls gained his way, including access to the studio's cranes. Bacher reveals the crew's initial suspicion at his working methods – 'why can't they stand still and say it?' – and the discomfort of Columbia executives at the lack of

coverage and close-ups that were shot. Apparently, the camera department presented Ophuls with a pair of roller skates at the wrap party so that he could 'keep up with the camera on his next', the party also the occasion of the first performance of James Mason's poem about Ophuls' passion for camera movement (1996: 281, 308).

Afterword: Choice 10 – Casting

In the late stages of working on this chapter, I presented the material as a paper to research seminars at the universities of Kent and Reading. On both occasions the paper was followed by stimulating discussion, and I want to draw attention to comparison between a further choice which was drawn to my attention. In the discussion at Reading, Aoife Monks made a telling observation about the casting of Tilda Swinton as Margaret: Swinton, with her history in independent British films (particularly the work of Derek Jarman and her starring role in *Orlando* (Sally Potter, 1992)) is a surprising figure to choose to embody an American middle class housewife.¹¹ (In 1949, the casting of Joan Bennett as Lucia also runs against type: although Bennett went on to play mothers in *Father of the Bride* (Vincente Minnelli, 1950) and *There's Always Tomorrow* (Douglas Sirk, 1956) her roles in films in the years preceding the *The Reckless Moment* are very different — *Scarlet Street* and *The Woman in the Window* (both Fritz Lang, 1947), *The Woman on the Beach* (Jean Renoir, 1947), *The Secret Beyond the Door* (Fritz Lang, 1948).) In *The Deep End* the casting opens such a gap between performer and role as to suggest intent, rather than ineptitude. Monks' point, developed further by her and others taking part in the discussion, was that this could be considered part of a broader attempt to draw attention to the way in which the traditional mother's role Margaret is trying to inhabit no longer exists in the early twenty-first century. The argument could connect with other elements of the film: the sense of separation and disjuncture achieved by *découpage* and *mise-en-scène*, the fact that Margaret seems to have time on her hands, that the family seem perfectly capable of getting on without her. Could *The Deep End* be understood as a deliberate attempt to replay a form from the 1940s (with roots stretching deeper in the melodramatic tradition), the discussion

considered, in order to examine how roles and certainties have changed?

Perhaps. It seems fair to say that there are impulses that carry *The Deep End* in these directions. My own response was, and remains, that these possible lines of inquiry do not bear the weight of a more comprehensive interpretation because there is not the structure, the matrix, necessary for individual elements to gain purchase. In another context, as my comparison with Ozu implies, the use of landscape could be an admirably effective strategy in establishing a contemplative perspective on the characters. *Mise-en-scène* and *découpage* might create a sense of distance between Margaret and the rest of her family in a film which had established family structures in other ways. Why did the filmmakers not invent a scene where Margaret cooks a meal for the family in the kitchen/dining room? It would have brought the family together for a moment, achieved a sense of interaction that could then have provided a context for the film's insistence on Margaret's separation, and could have been devised as a stressful activity to convey a sense of their demands on her – as a point of comparison think of the meal that Henry Hill (Ray Liotta) is trying to cook the day he is arrested in *Goodfellas* (Martin Scorsese, 1990). The housework that we actually see Margaret doing – running the washing machine and delivering the laundry to different parts of the house – is not the kind of task that would take precedence over raising blackmail money. An exercise in replaying earlier forms in a contemporary context would also have benefited from the film acknowledging its debt to its 1940s predecessor. Another point voiced in the discussion was the idea that perhaps the material of *The Blank Wall* and *The Reckless Moment* is so inherently about the relationship of the mother to her family, and constructed in such a way as to turn on a powerful involvement with her character, that it cannot harmoniously accommodate a project to create a central character of Antonioni-like remoteness.

I hope that looking at *The Deep End* has made it easier to see the effect of particular decisions in *The Reckless Moment* and vice versa, and helped demonstrate that each decision taken by the filmmakers has an impact on numerous others: period affects our way of understanding character, character development can be aided or hindered by colour scheme. In

the evaluative element of the discussion I have favoured the original, but remaking a movie invites comparison, and choosing to remake a film as accomplished as *The Reckless Moment* creates quite a challenge.

2. Choices around Generic Conventions: *Unforgiven* (1992)

In the production draft of David Webb Peoples' script, *The William Munny Killings*, dated April 23 1984, we find the following scene.

EXT. BIG WHISKEY HILL - DAY

EXTREME CLOSE UP ON DELILAH

Delilah's face! The cut-whore. Skeins of criss-crossing raised flesh, a vicious web of scars dominated by her eyes that are deep and beautiful.

She's hanging clothes on a clothes line on Big Whiskey Hill, the gentle slope above the town. Alice, Little Sue, Silky, Kate, and Faith are close by, hanging clothes or washing them in the gurgling stream.

Faith is the first to glance down the hill toward the town and to notice. She draws in her breath and turns to Alice and catches her eye and Alice looks down.

EXT. MUDDY NORTH ROAD

The muddy North Road and the two riders, and they are Quick Mike and Davey Bunting leading their ponies in, passing a crudely painted sign that says:

'Ordinance 14. No firearms in Big Whiskey. Deposit them at County Office. By Order of Sheriff.'

EXT. BIG WHISKEY HILL - DAY

The whores on the hill. One by one, with no words exchanged, they feel the silence and turn and exchange glances and they glance at Delilah. She winces and turns back to hanging clothes.

Readers familiar with *Unforgiven* (1992), the film made with this script, will immediately recognise ways in which the film's

realisation of the scene differs from the script's suggestions. Some of these differences are minor – in the film we do not read the sign bearing Ordinance 14 until W.W. Beauchamp (Saul Rubinek) notices it as he and English Bob (Richard Harris) arrive in town. More significantly, where the script has Delilah horribly disfigured as a result of Quick Mike's attack, in the film her scars are much less pronounced. Thirdly, while the film, like script, has Delilah (Anna Thomson) and the other prostitutes washing clothes and hanging them to dry, the setting is different. In the film, the laundry is being done behind a white picket fence attached to a white clapboard house. This house has a porch, equipped with a couple of rocking chairs, where one of the women sits, and another stands in a white apron, taking a few steps toward the riders as they pass. (The house is not high on Big Whiskey Hill, it is adjacent to the road into town along which the cowboys ride).

This chapter is concerned with choices made in organising generic conventions, and the investigation will begin with the unusual decision – initiated in the script, but taken much further in the finished film – to show the home life of the prostitutes of the town. We tend normally to think of the generic forebears of these women (the 'bar-girls' of so many westerns) inhabiting their place of work, and so even to show the women living together in a separate location is a significant decision, in terms of plot not strictly necessary. But the presentation of these women's lives outside of the brothel is even more striking. Although doing the washing or sitting on the porch are highly plausible activities for the characters, we are not often encouraged to think of prostitutes in westerns engaged in everyday domestic tasks; it is simply not a context in which we are invited to imagine them.





The appearance of the women is also surprising, not perhaps in terms of historical accuracy, but in generic association. As we can see more clearly a few moments later, when they throw clods of earth at the men, all the women are dressed in modest colours, browns, creams and blues. They wear their hair plainly, none of them are wearing make-up. Some, particularly Kate (Josie Smith) and Little Sue (Tara Dawn Frederick), seem more like girls than women. Their clothes are not showy dresses, with frilly undergarments and low-cut necklines, the familiar costume of the saloon entertainer, but instead garments which would not look out of place on the school mistress of *Big Whiskey* (although such a character does not appear in the film).

The setting, too, is perfectly credible but simultaneously rich in incongruous iconographic detail: the porch and the rocking chair are strongly associated with the pleasures and values of being a settler – *The Searchers* (John Ford, 1956), for example, trades heavily on this imagery – and we are all familiar with the white picket fence as a metonymic symbol of the American small town, past or present.

In short, these prostitutes inhabit the house, have the appearance and perform the activities conventionally associated with

settled women, their generic, social and (traditionally speaking) moral opposites. A group of socially-undesirable sex workers are found living in surroundings as resonant of American self-image as the White House lawn. What the film does here is to create a suggestive image by conflating two opposed traditions of generic representation. Moreover, in organising the conventions in this jarring and, within the terms of the debate, slightly sacrilegious way, the film draws attention to the conventions themselves – and what values they embody.

The collision of conventions that draws attention to what is bound up within those conventions might in another context be called a Brechtian strategy. If such a comparison seems far fetched, compare *Unforgotten's* image with Act Two, Scene Five of *The Threepenny Opera*. To quote from the stage directions: "An afternoon like any other; the whores, mostly in their shifts, are ironing clothes, playing draughts, or washing: a bourgeois idyll" (1979: 41). Brecht is striving for a similarly incongruous scene, where the prostitutes of Turnbridge are engaged in a range of housewifely tasks, as part of his dramatisation of the relationship between bourgeois and bandit. In either case, we might accurately call this a making of the familiar strange: setting against each other two opposed but well-known images,

with the effect of making normally acceptable assumptions vivid, unnatural.¹

More evidence of the film's awareness of its traditions of representation can be found at the end of the scene. As if to take the juxtaposition of different traditions of female representation further, the film cuts from the prostitutes silently standing in the street, having run the cowboys out of town, to a photograph of Claudia Feathers Munny. Claudia is one of only two wives that feature in the film's story, the other being Sally Two Trees (Cherrilene Cardina). One or two townswomen might be spied on the main street of Big Whiskey when English Bob is beaten up, but wives are mainly conspicuous by their absence. Sally Two Trees is a Native American, so she is rather unlike the 'settled woman' of our expectation. Indeed, a similar strategy is at work here: Sally seems the most successfully settled of all the characters in the film and for her to be the film's only living embodiment of the 'settled woman', given the genre's traditional association of Native Americans with erotic and dangerous heathenism, creates a composite character of comparable ideological paradox to the prostitutes.



Claudia, who has been dead for 3 years before the film's main action begins, is reported to us as having been a paragon of wifely virtue. We never see Claudia as she was in life, we only have evidence of how other characters refer to her, and the scraps of written narration that crawl up the screen in the film's opening and closing shots. Even her photograph is a standard nineteenth-century portrait, which reveals little of her character, beyond an imputed respectability. (The script suggests that the photograph portrays her 'smiling radiantly in her best dress' but these features, which might provide emotional and moral encouragement to her surviving husband, are absent from

the muted realisation.) Yet William Munny (Clint Eastwood) looks to Claudia as a moral point of reference throughout, to the extent that her name becomes a watchword or even a mantra for him. There are a couple of remarks from Ned (Morgan Freeman) which support Munny's view of his wife – 'Course, you know Will, if Claudia was alive you wouldn't be doing this' – but for the most part we have only the insistence of Munny, and the film may encourage us to feel that he protests the moral worth of his children's 'dear departed Ma' rather too much. His repeated claims about his dead wife's character and, especially, the force of her moral reform on him – 'I'm just a fella now. I ain't no different than anyone else, no more' – betray concern about the precariousness of these values. Perhaps we should be as cautious about Claudia's goodness as the film encourages us to be about the heroism of the Duke of Death? The cut from prostitute to civilising wife could have articulated a striking moral contrast, but instead the movement is from a whore who is presented in ways which narrow the potential for contrast to an archetype which exists only as an image, and one already receding into a mythicised past.

Examination of *Unforgiven*'s male characters provides support for the case that the film invites a highly self-conscious reflection on the traditions of representation with which it works, and enlivens our broader investigation of the significant choices that generic conventions make possible for the filmmaker. William Munny, we know from the outset, is man with a past and a reputation. Yet despite being played by the director-star, he begins the film not as a wandering hero but as a single parent and noticeably unsuccessful pig farmer. Munny is neither given the dignity of owning a ranch, nor even the more prosperous arable concern of Sally Two Trees and Ned Logan. Moreover, we soon discover that he cannot hit a tin at 10 yards with a pistol, and his repeated failings to mount his horse become a dryly comic motif for the film. This is an extraordinary assault on our expectations of the protagonist of a western. As John Cawelti has written, 'The hero is a man with a horse and the horse is his direct tie to the freedom of the wilderness, for it embodies his ability to move freely across it and to dominate and control its spirit' (1970: 57). The off-screen voice of the Schofield Kid (Jaimz Woolvett) accurately summarises the situation, as he says to the mud-besplattered Munny,

wallowing in the dirt of the pig sty, 'You don't look like no roo-tin', tootin', son-of-a-bitchin', cold-blooded assassin!'

If Munny is not the wandering hero who settled down with the heroine – he was, after all, 'a known thief and murderer, a man of notoriously vicious and intemperate disposition' – then he was certainly an independent man of action who took the settled part. At the beginning of the film Munny has been through the experience that confronts the hero at the end of many westerns and, in a vivid illustration of the fear that seems to haunt so many western heroes, marriage has resulted in a loss of potency. In settling down, in being civilised by Claudia, Munny has lost the poise and power of the westerner.



Another of the film's major characters who has attempted to settle down is Little Bill (Gene Hackman). To phrase it again through the film's skilful deployment of conventions, this time quoting one of the first remarks English Bob (Richard Harris) makes on recognising the sheriff of Big Whiskey, Little Bill has 'shaved [his] chin whiskers off'. In his essay in 'Why do cowboys wear their hats in the bath?', Martin Pumphrey argues that the absence of facial hair is one of the most consistent indicators of moral worth in the western. We expect our heroes to be clean cut, clean shaven: 'Unshavenness can signal exhaustion or illness, but until the spaghetti westerns of the 1960s began to play with the code, habitual stubble and moustaches were unmistakable signs of villainy' (1996: 53). Time and again the westerner will visit the barber's shop on his return to civilisation. (Pumphrey also points out that the Barber's shop is a place in which the westerner is under threat, his masculinity challenged – it is no coincidence that English Bob is surrounded while receiving a shave.) Little Bill has become part of, and defender of, the community, although whether his new way of

wearing his facial hair reveals a reformed character or merely the aspiration toward moral worth, is a subject of debate.

As was the case with Munny, Bill's settling down is not a straightforward or successful process. His penultimate words are: 'I don't deserve this. To die like this. I was building a house.' His bewilderment expresses the incongruity of being shot down despite having left the wandering life behind: being settled should guarantee protection against this kind of end. Earlier in the film we see him is working on the house, and imagining the evenings he will spend on his porch once it is completed, but the stresses involved in his accommodation manifest themselves in the structure of the building which 'don't have a straight angle in ... the whole house', and which leaks drastically when it rains.

Little Bill and William Munny end up antagonists in this film, though both, structurally speaking, could have claims to be the hero. Little Bill has the hero's traditional role of upholding law and order, keeping the town tame, yet goes about his job with a mixture of bravery, humour, pragmatism and cruelty. Munny is the avenging hero, and is played by Clint Eastwood, but is also a bounty hunter and a criminal who brings terror to the town, destroying its legal structures. Nothing in this film presents a clear-cut moral opposition.

In *The Six-Gun Mystique* (1970) and its more recent reworking, *The Six-Gun Mystique Sequel* (1999), John Cawelti discusses the way in which the traditional western hero is a chivalric figure, not far removed from the heroes of Sir Walter Scott, and that this character is revealed in the hero's relationship to violence, especially as it is structured in the form of the showdown:

Where the knight encountered his adversary in bloody hand-to-hand combat, the cowboy invariably meets his at a substantial distance and goes through the complex and rigid ritual of the 'draw' before finally consummating the fatal deed. The most important implication of this killing procedure seems to be the qualities of reluctance, control and elegance that it associates with the hero. Unlike the knight, the cowboy hero does not seek out combat for its own sake and he typically shows an aversion to the wanton shedding of blood. Killing is an act forced upon him and

he carries it out with the precision and skill of a surgeon and the careful proportions of an artist. We might say that the six-gun is a weapon which enables the hero to show the largest measure of objectivity and detachment while yet engaging in individual combat. This controlled and aesthetic mode of killing is particularly important as the supreme mark of differentiation between the hero and the savage. The Indian or outlaw as savage delights in slaughter, entering into combat with a kind of manic glee to fulfil an uncontrolled lust for blood. The hero rarely engages in violence until the last moment and he never kills until the savage's gun has already cleared his holster. Suddenly it is there and the villain crumples. (1970: 59)

W.W. Beauchamp's *The Duke of Death* clearly represents the duel between Corcoran and English Bob in such terms. As Little Bill renders it: "You have insulted the honor of this beautiful woman, Corcoran," said the Duck. "You must apologize." But Two Gun Corcoran would have none of it and, cursing, he reached for his pistols and would have killed them but the Duck was faster and hot lead blazed from his smoking sixguns.' Yet the film's presentation of its central conflicts – and Little Bill's alternative account of the night in the Blue Bottle Saloon – could not be more different.



Even after the assaults on generic certainties perpetrated in 60s and 70s by directors such as Sam Peckinpah, Robert Aldrich and Eastwood himself, we still have a residual expectation of a showdown between morally-opposed forces. *Unforgotten* does not fulfil this expectation in any straightforward way. This is partly due to the ambivalence of characters: Delilah's attackers, the hired killers and the sheriff. The guilt of the cowboys

has been tempered, particularly in the case of Davey (Rob Campbell), who is an accomplice to the crime rather its perpetrator – indeed, after initially holding Delilah, he actually tries to restrain Mike (David Mucci) – and is also clearly repentant for the action. From the moment Davey attempts to give Delilah a horse, a better horse than either of the two with which he is obliged to compensate Skinny (Anthony James), we can see that even the prostitutes have forcibly to renew their anger – as they are compelled to do since the news of the bounty has spread far and wide, and there is no going back. After they have driven off the cowboys, the camera watches the women as they watch them ride away, the uncertainty written on their faces underscored by the sombre music. Alice's words, with which she screws up her and the others' anger, 'She ain't got no face left, and all you can give her is a mangy pony!' are manifestly an exaggeration in relation to the horse and, more importantly, Delilah.

The fact that Delilah's injuries are not as devastating as is reported, here and elsewhere, qualifies much of the action of the rest of the film, pointing up the way in which the story of the attack becomes a moral crutch grasped by the bounty hunters to justify their actions, and expressed through the repeated refrain 'they had it coming'. This is not to minimise the significance of the attack, nor the injustice which Little Bill dispenses in regarding the damage done to Delilah purely as an attack on Skinny's property. But what we can say is that the two cowboys are not unambiguously evil, that there is no honour in their deaths, and that their executioners are not supported in their actions by a clear moral foundation.

Given the way in which Little Bill has destroyed the image of the chivalrous Duke of Death, we may no longer be expecting a classic stand-off, but there is nothing romantic at all about the bounty killings. Davey is attacked without warning with a Spencer rifle from a protected position. The scene is agonisingly drawn out as he attempts to drag himself to safety with his broken leg, the first bullet having killed his horse, and then bleeds to death after being shot through the stomach. Davey's requests to be given a drink give us a vivid insight into his last experiences.

We are spared nothing as the scene plays out: placed close to Davey as he struggles to find cover, but also given an



unsentimental view of the attackers. Ned cannot bring himself to shoot again after the first shot and Munny's attempts to land a second are gratingly interrupted by the short-sighted Kid's demands to know what is going on. At the same time, we are awkwardly affected by the tension arising from the fact that unless they shoot Davey quickly, he is going to make cover and they will have to go down to the valley floor to finish the job.



After Davey has been shot, we wait to listen to his death with the killers. He cries out, 'I'm dying boys!' to his comrades and the Kid shouts back: 'Well, then you shouldn't have cut up no woman, you asshole!' Again the film is precise about the evidence, but the characters are interesting for their exaggeration and imprecision when justifying their actions. The second cowboy, Quick Mike, who did cut Delilah, is shot at point blank range, unarmed, in the 'shit house' at the Bar T.

The treatment of these killings has something of what Cawelti describes, elsewhere, as 'a situation that we are ordinarily accustomed to seeing in rather romanticized terms [being] suddenly invested with a sense of reality' (1979, 1995: 236). Cawelti makes these remarks – in the context of the challenge presented to the traditional genres by films from the mid- to late

sixties and early seventies – about what he calls the 'humorous burlesque' mode of generic transformation, although in *Unforgiven* the tactic has more in common with another of Cawelti's modes, that of 'demythologization'. In terms of this chapter's argument we may, again, note that the similarities between this process and 'making strange' the familiar.

Adding a further level of complexity to the film's analysis, immediately after the shooting of Quick Mike we witness the beginning of a process of romanticising this most unromantic of acts. The kid's account – 'I shot that fucker three times. He was taking a shit and he went for his pistol and I blazed away. First shot... I got him right in the chest' – already contradicts what we have seen in its suggestion of a contest. But for once, the kid cannot keep up his bravado, and reveals the falsehood, that we have long suspected, of his earlier claims to be a killer, eventually consoling himself with the thought that 'they had it coming'. In this way the film makes clear the relationship between the 'Chinese whispers' which spread concerning the extent of the injury inflicted on Delilah, and the parallel aggrandising of acts in the dime novels of Beauchamp.

Finally, there is Munny's eventual revenge on Little Bill and his deputies. A number of critics have accused the film of double standards in its last ten minutes. David Thomson, for example, asks of Eastwood's character: 'How does his understandable ineptness as a gunfighter suddenly and conveniently fall aside to reveal the old Leone-esque angel of death?' (2002: 263) And we might want to give Thomson's objection some credence: after the way in which the film's violence has been stripped of any glamour, after the wittiness of the analysis of Western conventions in the form of the dime novel, in the face of the ineptitude Munny has demonstrated throughout the film, and following that extraordinary line about death in the preceding scene – 'It's a hell of a thing, killing a man. You take away all he's got and all he's ever gonna have', delivered by the lone pine tree in the cold light of late afternoon – the film now gives us an act of violence more accomplished than any W. W. Beauchamp could have hoped to witness.

Yet here too it is important to look at the way the film works with generic conventions, combined with the self-conscious setting of elements against one another. The turning point of the film is when Munny, on hearing about the death of Ned,



takes the whiskey bottle with which the kid has been consoling himself, and which he has consistently refused hitherto, and starts to drink.

Whiskey, of course, has particular associations in the western. It is the hard man's drink, taken neat in shot glasses, banged down upon the bar. If coffee is associated with companionship and settling down – to take an example from the present film, what Little Bill intends to do with the porch he is constructing is to 'sit of an evening and smoke my pipe, drink coffee and watch the sunset' – whiskey's association is with raw masculinity.

Beyond the inherited associations of whiskey, the film develops its own significance for the drink. Will first mentions it when he declines the kid's invitation to ride with him: 'I ain't like that anymore, Kid. It was whiskey done it as much as anything else. I ain't had a drop of it in over ten years. My wife, she cured me of that, cured me of drink and wickedness.' He says something similar to Ned, during their conversation on their first night on the road. Later in the journey, when it comes on to rain, Ned offers Will a bottle of whiskey which he brought 'for when we have to kill them fellas'. After he has shot Quick Mike, the Kid drinks whiskey as fast as he can, and

Will answers his question about whether he was ever scared in 'them days' by saying that he can't remember because he was drunk most of the time. Munny throws away the empty bottle as he rides up the main street toward Greely's Saloon.

It seems that in order to shoot a man, it is necessary to be drunk. A vital element of the acts of violence which are referred to and take place in the film, with the exception of those committed by Little Bill, is that the perpetrators need to be intoxicated to carry them out at all.² All the behaviour that the Kid and W.W. Beauchamp are inspired by, all the great acts of masculine prowess, are the product of intoxication. To put the point the other way around, whiskey is associated with a definition of masculinity which is practically psychopathic. As Munny says to Ned by the campfire, before avowing how he has changed, 'You remember that drover I shot through the mouth and his teeth came out the back of his head? ... I think about him now and again. He didn't do anything to deserve getting shot, at least, nothing I could remember when I sobered up.' So in one sense, Thomson's objection can be answered in relation to this motif. Certainly, Munny has regained his potency, a degree of accuracy, and the weight of the Eastwood persona. But it is the return to drinking whiskey – with everything that

entails, including the death of six men – that has effected this transformation.³

Again, through careful choices, the film defines more precisely what was a potentiality of the script. In *The William Munny Killings*, Munny drinks from almost the beginning of the scene by the lone pine. The line where he responds to the kid's enquiry about the old days by saying that he cannot remember because he was drunk most of the time continues, in the production draft, with Munny saying to the kid, 'Give me a pull on that bottle, will you?' In the film, however, as Ed Gallafent has pointed out, the timing of Munny's first drink is precise and significant. Little Sue is describing how Little Bill has beaten the truth about their identities out of Ned and 'exactly as she speaks the words, "You was really William Munny out of Missouri", we see the character lift the bottle to his lips for the first time' (1994: 226). The return of William Munny – the restored westerner, rather than the man living in retired anonymity or beaten under the pseudonym Hendershot – corresponds exactly to his return to drinking whiskey.

There is a delicate balance, too, in the final minutes, because the film does not, in one sense, step outside the reality of the world it has presented. If we feel that Munny now has all the lines, the character earlier established had been tersely but eloquently short spoken. In the shoot-out Munny very methodically fires at his adversaries, whilst nerves get the better of them. There is nothing in this stand-off that contradicts Little Bill's dictums on what death and killing were really like in the old West. There is no fancy gunplay, no fast draw – just luck, and a comparatively cool head. The film plays its final act as an ironic coda which sets up awkward tensions in relation to our enjoyment of the film whilst also respecting the rules which it has earlier established.

At the same time, this careful articulation of Munny's transformation via the bottle, and the play on contrasting masculine images that it involves, achieves a further dimension of 'making strange' by implicating the spectator in the exhilaration of the climactic sequence as well as its horror. If we take pleasure in the belated appearance of the Eastwood persona, replete with growled pay-off lines, satisfying our desire to see Ned avenged, this pleasure is clearly at odds with all the work that the film has done so far to draw out the squalor of violence and the finality

of death. Our awareness that this is an act more accomplished than any of those which W. W. Beauchamp has written about, and perhaps even our pride that Munny has accomplished it, sits uncomfortably with a range of other feelings which the film has set in play, including our sympathies with some of Munny's victims, and the views which the film had earlier encouraged us to side with. This is perhaps the film's boldest and most complexly worked of all its choices in the deployment of generic convention, not a 'making strange' which we can coolly observe but a set of contradictions which are played out in our affective responses as well as our judgement and moral sense. Like the killing of Davey, where our feelings were painfully mixed, the film creates a complex position for the audience, who are asked to balance compound and contradictory impulses and levels of understanding.

Conclusion

Unforgiven, in common with some other post-classical westerns, is interested in experiences which were not major concerns of the tradition. It begins by telling the story of the prostitutes of Big Whiskey, their collective response to their exclusion from the processes of law and order, after an original act of violence itself caused by a precarious masculinity – 'All she done, when she seen he has a teensy little pecker, is give a giggle. That's all. She didn't know no better.' In this context it seems highly appropriate that the film's way of dramatising such a story is to challenge, rather than unthinkingly accept, the genre's means of expression. A film that explores untold experience from the old West, it achieves its analysis through reflection on the traditions of representation themselves.

In the course of the chapter I have drawn attention to a number differences between film and script. Doing so is not intended to belittle David Webb Peoples' achievement: organising generic conventions is as much the job of writer as it is director and *The William Munny Killings* is a wonderful script which the film follows faithfully. *Unforgiven* does not include any scenes that do not appear in the script, its structural differences are those of excision – a final scene where Munny returns home is cut, for example, as is a feverish flashback to Munny's mistreatment of a horse in his former life.

What I hope the earlier discussion does reveal is how Eastwood and his on-set collaborators have developed and refined some of the impulses of the script. Our opening example examined the way the film exposed – iconographically – some of the values bound up in the character types with which it was working, but this is entirely in keeping with both the demythologising impulse of the whole film and its interest in the women's story. Instead of an extreme close-up of a face raised by 'a vicious web of scars,' we encounter a less



damagingly disfigured Delilah in a shot wide enough to admit the consolation of Strawberry Alice, which follows two long shots introducing the domestic context and placing Delilah in the company of her comrades. The more modest injuries she bears counterpoint the exaggeration in the accounts of her wounding, undercutting the moral self-justification the bounty hunters, and making more effective the parallel between the different acts of mythologisation in the film. Similarly, making Claudia Munny's portrait entirely conventional gently undercuts the support a smiling portrait would give to the claims of woman's husband about her extraordinary qualities. With these changes in inflection the film extends our awareness of the mythic beyond the prowess of the westerner and identifies this tendency in the characters' relationship to the past more generally. Removing the delirious flashback to Munny's youth ensures that his history remains a matter of anecdote, rather than evidence, and cutting the scene of his return to the pig farm enables the film itself to end, in Gallafent's phrase, 'by fading into rumour and vague report' (1994: 228). What the film does in the playing, in its realisation, is to turn further from the expected, to qualify the broad statement, to make the generic familiar strange.

3. Choices around narrative structure: Coincidences in *Lured* (1947)

'Coincidence. It's coincidence that you own a *Westminster* typewriter. It's coincidence that certain keys are out of alignment. It's *also* coincidence that you use *Victoria* paper. And of course, it's merely coincidence that pictures of missing girls were in your possession, and that letters they wrote in answer to personal column advertisements were found in your files!'

This chapter is concerned with choices made in narrative structure, with a particular focus on the effects that can be achieved through the juxtaposition of scenes and dramatic events – notably through the use of coincidence. The film under discussion is *Lured* (Douglas Sirk, 1947), a movie which has largely escaped critical attention, but which was a personal favourite of the director.¹

Coincidence is often regarded rather dismissively when narratives are discussed. Historically, one of the reasons for attacking forms of melodrama, for example, has been the contrivance of plots and dramatic situations, as though exhibiting contrivance inevitably implied a failure of aesthetic judgement. Yet coincidence – which does have a particular association with melodrama – is often a vital strategy in the symbolic economy of narrative.

Thomas Elsaesser argues as much in 'Tales of Sound and Fury', the article which had such an important role for the study of film in championing melodrama, when he discusses the importance of coincidence, and other elements of melodramatic dramaturgy, to writers such as Collins, Dickens, Reade, Sue, Hugo and Balzac. Of these, he argues, the English writers 'relied heavily on melodramatic plots to sharpen social conflicts and portray an urban environment where chance encounters, coincidences, and the side-by-side existence of extreme social

and moral contrasts were the natural products of the very conditions of existence' (1972: 4). He also writes of Dickens using 'the element of chance' to 'feel his way towards a portrayal of existential insecurity and moral anguish which fiction had previously not encompassed' (ibid.). Coincidence makes available to filmmakers, and artists in other narrative traditions, a powerful opportunity for juxtaposition, for making connections or sharpening contrasts.

An example an expressive juxtaposition of the connecting kind is identified by Charles Barr in his account of the first version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1934). In a St Moritz setting, Louis Bernard (Pierre Fresnay) has established a 'warm holiday friendship' (1999: 135) with Jill and Bob Lawrence (Edna Best and Leslie Banks), and at the same time a relationship 'of weirdly exaggerated flirtation' with Jill, 'at which Bob, with equal exaggeration, connives':

We see Bob and Betty [Jill and Bob's daughter, played by Nova Pilbeam] sitting together in the restaurant, while Jill and Louis dance provocatively by, pausing at the table to tease him:

Louis: What do you think of the average Englishman?

Jill: Much too cold...

In revenge, with Betty's help, Bob takes the unfinished jumper that Jill is knitting for (of course) Louis, and hooks the end of it over the back button of Louis's dinner jacket. When he glides off again, this gradually disrupts the movement on the dance floor, as the knitting unravels and couples get comically tangled up by the wool. Another man attracts Louis's attention, to point out the wool snagged on his button. He stops and turns, and it is at this moment that he is shot dead.

If Bob had been the killer's accomplice, arranging for Louis to stop at the right moment by the window and present a sitting target, the manoeuvre could not have been more neatly calculated. The shot comes out of the blue, or rather the white of the snow, precisely as *if* willed by Bob, to punish Louis for his threat to the stability of the family, his exposure and exploitation of its internal tensions. (1999: 136–37)

Barr's discussion convincingly develops into an argument which establishes broader patterns in the film's organisation, in which public and private worlds are brought together and characters' desires find grotesque fulfilment. Although by no means the only filmmaker to use this kind of strategy, movies directed by Hitchcock frequently utilise the dramatic and thematic potential of the significant association of apparently unconnected elements. This reaches an extreme in *Rear Window* (1954), where the whole film is structured around juxtapositions between the activities that take place in L.B. Jeffries' (James Stewart) flat and the actions and experiences of his neighbours that take place simultaneously on the other side of the courtyard.

Rather than accept them unthinkingly or dismiss them hastily, we need to be ready to interrogate the connection between particular events or actions by means of narrative structure, recognising this as a part of a vital area of choice for filmmakers. In any movie worth watching a coincidence is unlikely to be only a coincidence. *Lured* provides a good example of how narrative juxtaposition can be organised to significant effect and the examination of a number of coincidences in the film's early scenes, and a series of parallels across the narrative more generally, enable us to move rapidly to the heart of the film's processes and concerns.

The scene I wish to consider begins in the thirteenth minute of the movie. We have, by this stage, already been introduced to Sandra Carpenter (Lucille Ball) and her friend Lucy Barnard (Tanis Chandler) at the taxi dance where they work. We have been given a partial view of Lucy's date with 'John', a man she has met through the personal columns, and heard about her intention to give up her work and go off with him. We have seen a shadowy figure dispatch a letter to Scotland Yard, and watched the reaction of the police to the appearance of the latest in a series of poems which have preceded the disappearance of a series of young women. We know that Lucy wears a bracelet of carved elephants as a good luck charm, and that the latest poem refers to 'Elephants' which 'encircle her smooth white arm'. We have even been witness to the discussion between Inspector Temple (Charles Coburn) and Professor Harkness (uncredited), a literary expert who has been able to identify the aspirational relationship between the verse of the 'poet-killer'

and the poetry of Baudelaire, and their shared insistence on a correspondence between beauty and death.

This scene between Inspector Temple and Professor Harkness immediately precedes the action which we are about to consider, and the conversation between the men is fresh in our minds as our sequence begins. Professor Harkness has argued that:

Baudelaire was obsessed with the notion that death is beautiful. Listen to this: 'A beauty, still more beautiful in death.' Your criminal has the same delusions: 'A beauty that only death can enhance.'

He goes on to describe the murderer in the following terms:

...if he's at all like Baudelaire, he'll be constantly in search of beauty, and courting it. A new lovely face will always appeal to him, or some unusual attractiveness will intrigue him, inspire him to a destructiveness. He'll delight in variety and never be quite content with what he finds.

This is summarised by Temple as 'sort of a modern Don Juan', a description which the literary expert partially accepts.

Back at the Broadway Palladium, Sandra has asked the manager of the taxi dance whether she can take time off to attend an audition for the prestigious Fleming and Wilde nightclub chain. Having been refused permission – 'Not unless you want to lose your job, girlie' – she storms out of his office and, after a moment's reflection, up to the phone on the bar to cancel her audition and, hopefully, make another appointment.

The film cuts from the telephone on which Sandra is making her call to a tight shot of a second telephone on a desk, ringing. Behind it we can see the back of a photograph frame and, to the left, the side pocket, elbow and flank of a suit jacket. On the second ring, the forearm of the suited figure reaches down into the frame and picks up the receiver; the camera follows the movement of the hand toward the ear, but the tilt reveals that the man holding the receiver (George Sanders) is engaged in a passionate embrace with a woman wearing a fur coat (uncredited).



Without breaking off the kiss, the woman takes the receiver and holds it behind her back, the camera tilting and panning to accommodate this movement as well. We can hear Sandra's voice 'Hello? Hello? Fleming and Wilde Theatrical Enterprises?', and then again 'Hello?'. After a further period, the woman moves the phone round to her face, the film cutting on this action to a wider shot, and the conversation continues as follows:

2. Match cut to wider view

Woman: Hello?

Sandra: Mr Fleming's secretary please.

Woman: Oh, just a moment.

Fleming: Who is it?

Woman: Darling, it's not for you, she wants your secretary.

Fleming: She? [he takes the receiver from her] Hello?

3. Sandra in bar

Sandra: Mr Fleming's secretary?

Fleming: Yes.

Sandra: This is Sandra Carpenter.

Fleming: Who?

Sandra: Sandra Carpenter. I was due to come in tonight for an audition. Mr Milton gave me a card. But I can't possibly

get away, the manager.... Would you tell Mr Fleming for me?

4. Office, medium close-up

Fleming: Mr Fleming will be very disappointed, I'm sure: you have such a charming voice.



5. Bar, closer view, 30-degree change of angle

Sandra: Oh, well I don't sing, you know, I dance.

6. Office, the same as 4

Fleming: I bet you do, and beautifully. Perhaps we can arrange a private interview.

Woman: You're intolerable. [As she says this, Woman turns to face away from Fleming, but remains standing next to him.]

Fleming: Hold the line, please, something's out of order here. [Covers receiver.] Jealousy's eyes are green, my dear, don't let yours turn that dreadful colour.

Woman: You're incorrigible. [Woman starts to apply her lipstick.]

Fleming: Of course I am, I am an unmitigated cad. [Takes hand away from receiver.] Now carry on my dear, talk to me.



7. Bar, medium long shot

Sandra: Look here, is it customary for Mr Fleming's secretary to pass judgement for his boss?

8. Office, wider shot, change of angle

Fleming: Mr Fleming never makes a move without me. In fact, he very frequently has me take his young ladies out to dinner, in order to talk things over.

9. Bar, same as 7

Sandra: Thanks, I'll go hungry.

Customer: Lemon squash, please.

Fleming: You're an American, aren't you?

Sandra: So?

10. Office, still wider view, wide-angle lens

Fleming: Mr Fleming is quite partial to American girls, they have an irresistible way of putting a man on the defensive.

Woman: Robert! You're im...

Fleming: ...possible. What were you saying?

11. Bar, same as 7

Sandra: Would it be against Mr Fleming's Anglo-American policy to tell a girl when the next audition is please?



12. Office, same as 10

Fleming: [Woman now standing in doorway looking challengingly at Fleming.] Tomorrow night at nine. Can you make it?

Sandra: I think so.

Fleming: I guarantee that you'll see Mr Fleming personally. [Looks round at Woman.] Now are you happy?

Sandra: I'm very happy. [Woman leaves, slamming door]

Fleming: Then why don't you smile.



13. Bar, similar scale and angle to 3

Sandra: Alright, I'm smiling. Any more instructions Mr Sec.... [Sandra turns round, catches sight of a customer's newspaper, puts down phone and grabs paper as camera tracks in on headline: 'Dancer Reported Missing', and the subheading: 'Lucy Barnard Feared Eighth Victim of "Poet-killer"'. The score blares.]

14. Office, similar scale and lens to 10, but 30-degree change in angle which reveals another doorway

Fleming: Miss Carpenter? Hello? [Fleming agitates the cradle of the telephone.] Hello? [Wilde enters through the newly revealed doorway behind Fleming and walks toward the desk; Fleming turns and sees him] Oh, hello Julian. [He looks into the receiver, then puts it down.]

Wilde: Chapman has just delivered the architects drawings.

Fleming: I feel rather like Napoleon after Waterloo.

Wilde: You sound more like Romeo after Juliet closed the balcony window.

Fleming: That's the first girl whose hung up on me in years.

Wilde: It's well overdue. Take a look at these, Robert. I think the plans are perfect now. We shall have the finest nightclub in London.

The juxtaposition of Sandra's discovery of Lucy's disappearance and her first conversation with Fleming, followed by the appearance, immediately afterwards, of Fleming's business partner Julian Wilde (Cedric Hardwicke), is the nexus of coincidence from which I wish to launch this discussion. Why interrupt this phone call with Sandra's discovery of Lucy's disappearance? Why then leave Sandra and stay with Fleming to witness the entrance of, and ensuing conversation with, Wilde?

A number of features of the sequence provide a context for thinking about these questions. One is the extraordinary introduction to Fleming: remarkable in its economy and efficiency – though characteristic of the best sequences of the film in this respect – and remarkable in the character thereby constructed. Fleming transforms himself from distracted lover to focussed pursuer in a matter of seconds, and from intimate embrace to separation in less than two minutes.

The sequence moves from the surprising intimacy of the first shot, to views which make physical the growing distance between the couple. Each time we cut back to Fleming and his female companion, the tendency is for us to be given a wider view.² When Fleming compliments Sandra on her voice, the framing is less tight than the shot of the kiss. The set-up used for the shot in which the woman turns her back on Fleming, is replaced, when we return from the bar, by a wider view of the two of them. By the time Fleming is telling Sandra when she can next attend an audition, the woman has moved to the door and stands looking haughtily and questioningly at Fleming, a wide-angle lens accentuating the space between them. The separation is completed when she slams the door: shot 12 is not a wider view than 10, but the action makes the emotional situation plain and neatly completes this trajectory of the scene.

The line 'happy now?' is directed by Fleming both to Sandra and to the woman standing in the open doorway. Such is the audacity of this man that he can advance his suit with one woman while using the same expression to finish with another. (If this is not the couple literally splitting up, it is as far as the film is concerned: the next time we meet this woman, at Fleming's nightclub, she is emphatically an 'ex'.) It is also worth noting that Fleming remains sitting through these events; through what could be a moving exchange (both in terms of the phone call and the row) he has merely settled himself more comfortably on the desk, facing half away from the woman in the room. This is the behaviour of a someone of great self-assurance. He only stands up when Sandra has put the phone down on him, an action which consequently stands out, inviting us to wonder why Fleming is now so disturbed? It is not that he will not be able to make contact with Sandra again; she has just made an audition appointment for the following evening. Is it the fact that something is more important to her than him that agitates, or is it just the fact of a woman putting the phone down on Robert Fleming? The scene began with Sandra speaking into an unanswered phone – now it is Fleming.

The sequence makes it important to distinguish carefully between our own perspective and Sandra's. Sandra is certainly aware that she is in discussion with a rather dangerous character, romantically speaking, but she cannot be aware of the simultaneous dispatch of her potential predecessor. The

audience, on the other hand, see and hear the duality of the telephone conversation and benefit from the perspectives on the action provided by framing and composition.

We are also privileged over Sandra in information and impressions achieved through the organisation of the film's narrative structure: particularly, we have been witness to the conversation between Temple and Harkness only moments (of screen time) before. The sequence presents a somebody who most convincingly answers the pathology of character presented by Professor Harkness. Would it be possible to show more immediately a character whose romantic and sexual interest moves from woman to woman? In this short scene (just over two minutes long) he has ditched one for another or, at the least, been prepared to sacrifice his existing relationship, which seemed intense enough at the beginning of the phone call, for the possibility of contact with Sandra. It is clear from the response of the woman, moreover – she calls him 'incorrigible' – that this is not atypical behaviour. In addition to this inconstancy, Fleming has displayed a marked tendency to be have his head turned by 'some unusual attractiveness', in this case Sandra's voice, which has 'inspire[d] him to ... destructiveness' – if not, as Harkness means, against the possessor of the attractiveness, then certainly to the detriment of his previous relationship. Whether or not a ladykiller in the literal sense of the word, Fleming is undoubtedly one in the metaphorical.

One of the effects of the film's narrative structure, therefore, both through the organisation of scenes which precede the telephone call and by the abrupt introduction of the newspaper headline, is to suggest the possibility that Fleming is the poet-killer. Whether Fleming turns out to be the murderer – he does not – is not, ultimately, what is important here. What is of greater significance in the overall pattern of the film is how readily Fleming fits the profile presented by Professor Harkness, his relationship to the psychosexual behaviour described surviving Inspector Temple's later attempt to distinguish between the outgoing, socially skilful Fleming and the more retiring characteristics which he feels belong to the poet-killer.

'A beauty that only Death can enhance' – this is the line which is taken as reflecting the tenor of the poems, repeated several times in the dialogue. The outlook embodied in these words, the way of seeing which views the dead body as more attractive

than the living, refuses independent volition or autonomy to the woman concerned. The author of these lines is not interested in the subjective experience of the person he is writing about, only her appearance. The poet-killer eradicates his victim's mind so that his appreciation of the body can be unalloyed. (It is not that his victims would not consent to a real relationship with him: Lucy clearly and joyfully consents to the proposal to go off with 'John', even if we suspect that there may be a pragmatic financial element to her attraction to him as well as a romantic one.) The murdered women are subjected to an extreme form of objectification.

If there is only one character who takes the process of objectification to this length, there are many others who practise it in less extreme forms. The film plays with the idea that not only Fleming but also a number of the other men we meet could be the murderer; importantly, all of them share key characteristics with the killer. Evidence to support this claim is provided in the first instance by the taxi dance: not only the sizing up performed by its clientele – the sailor: 'Spin around, sweetheart'; and Oswald Pickering: 'Strike me pink! If you ain't the prettiest little girl in the whole place' – but the description by the promoter, whose patter introduces us to the Palladium:

'Fifty beautiful, ravishing, glamorous dance partners. Fifty girls of your dreams to hold in your arms: short dreams, tall dreams, blonde and brunette. Dance with one or dance with fifty. Only six pence a dance, gentlemen.'

Short, tall, blonde, brunette: immediately we witness a reduction of whole to part, person to appearance, and a commercial operation promising to fulfil desires predicated on 'some unusual attractiveness'. Then there is the succession of characters that Sandra meets in the course of her investigations. Van Druten (Boris Karloff), for example, is very particular in his choice of models, speaking approvingly of Sandra as possessing 'the van Druten figure'. We might refer to Maxwell (Alan Mowbray), the butler at 18 Kenilworth Square who looks Sandra up and down as part of the interview process, or to Sir Charles (Charles Coleman), his employer, who approves the advert specifying attractiveness in his search for a parlour maid. Remember, too, Mr Moryani (Joseph Calleia), the procurer, for whom Maxwell

also works, who rejects Sandra on the grounds that she is too intelligent. Even Inspector Temple needs to be included in this list, his appraisal later paralleled by Maxwell's (both of them eye her figure; both of them, like Fleming in the telephone scene, sit on the edge of a table while considering her), and its implications pointed up at the time by Sandra's deadpan remarks ('Uh-Oh', 'Now it comes'). It is fair to say that Temple's action is designed to anticipate the response of the killer, and that he equally esteems Sandra's powers of observation, but the fact that he and the other detectives have feelings for her which exceed the usual regard between colleagues is made very clear in the film, not least through the series of shots which show their reaction to the news of her engagement. These similarities in behaviour are not coincidences, but they are parallels within the narrative structure – correspondences between police and criminals, romantic lead and lascivious minor characters.



In addition to this widespread appearance of characteristics that relate to the pathology of the murderer, it is worth noting that Fleming, the film's male lead, frequently behaves in ways that invite comparison with the other male characters, including some of the most unsavoury. He also is a potential employer who mixes romantic interest with professional: at the audition that never happens, he would have subjected Sandra to similar scrutiny to that which she receives from Temple, van



Druten, Maxwell and Moryani. In the telephone scene, and for a little while subsequently, he hides his identity from her by pretending to be his secretary: all of the men who have ads in the personal column, including, of course, the poet-killer, also employ pseudonyms. Are the words of Oswald Pickering, the customer at the Taxi dance so different to those – more sophisticated, more charming admittedly – of Robert Fleming?³ Just as there was a financial transaction between Pickering and Sandra

(he has paid for the dance, the Palladium pays her wages) so also there is the promise of one between 'Fleming's Secretary' and Sandra. Fleming's behaviour toward Sandra's voice on the telephone is in itself a form of blind date, the *modus operandi* of the poet-killer. Sandra subsequently has her own reasons for suspecting that Fleming might be the killer and he becomes one of the men she is investigating, but not until the evening of her trip to meet the 'music lover' at the Schubert recital. At present, he is merely one of the men she has to negotiate in life, work and play.⁴

One of the primary structuring decisions in the narrative of *Lured* is that once she has been taken on as a detective by Scotland Yard, we encounter most of the film's events and all of the film's suspects in Sandra's company. There are some short sequences at which Sandra is not present at all: the action which runs from Fleming talking to Milton through to Maxwell adapting Sir Charles' advertisement, for example, which introduces Kenilworth Square before Sandra gets there. Within sequences, too, we are sometimes privileged over her. This is true of the phone call scene and it will be for moments in the dynamic of scenes again: we see plenty of Fleming's activities at the concert that she does not; in a later scene, that we see Mr Moryani covertly listening to her phone call to Scotland Yard helps to build suspense; the audience can hear the commentary that Fleming's ex gives on his technique at the nightclub when Sandra cannot. But the general point is that as Sandra opens her investigation into the authors of a series of personal column ads, we scrutinise them with her. And because we do not know who is the killer, all of these men – with the exception of Temple but not, on his introduction, Barrett (George Zucco) – are possible psychosexual killers.

In addition to this structural alignment between our position and Sandra's in the film's mystery story, the film's success depends on our emotional relationship with Sandra. One of the major pleasures of the film, I would argue, is the way in which Sandra's character and, of course, Lucille Ball's performance enlist us on her side in an investigation, in which every man is suspect. This is not to say that we view all of the male characters with horror – Fleming can be a very charming cad – but we are invited to look at all of them sceptically, and are likely to respond to the way Sandra conducts herself through some

difficult situations. For example, consider the way she deals with Fleming, in the telephone scene or at the nightclub where she is one step ahead of the moves which the commentary that accompanies their dance leads us to expect him to make. Or remember the way she extracts information from Maxwell. There is a wonderful disregard that Sandra shows in the physicalisation of Ball's performance: the way she puts her elbow on Oswald Pickering's shoulder at the taxi dance; the sigh she gives as she gathers that she must meet with 'Music Lover' at the Ionian Hall to 'share his ecstasy'; the way she walks to the bar to phone Fleming and Wilde. And then there is Sandra's dry sense of humour: evinced by her responses to Temple as he asks her to lift her skirt above her knees, and later close her eyes when he is deciding whether she will make suitable material for the force. Sandra is a dynamic protagonist for the film, and if the procedural scenes after Fleming's arrest are the least interesting in the movie, it is because she is in so few of them.

The coincidence of the interrupted phone call introduces a pattern in which the story of Sandra's investigation of Lucy's disappearance is continually entwined with a focus on her pursuit of a career and an interest in her chances of romantic happiness. These combined concerns are developed through the way in which many of the personal ads lead to job interviews: the first one she responds to, where the vacancy has already been 'adequately filled'; her short-lived role working as a model for van Druten; the job at Kenilworth Square, which has been advertised in the personal column. This is a world where men pay for the pleasure of a dance, you are hired by the police for your attractiveness, and an audition can become confused with a date. Everywhere Sandra turns, she encounters economic or professional activities that turn on the attractiveness of women; equally, many of the film's romantic relationships are shaped by a financial balance of power. The relationship between the economic and sexual are played out in many different variations in the film.

So, Fleming's behaviour is similar to a number of the other men in the film, in ways which I am arguing are also connected to the paradigm of the murderer. Yet while the film is deliberately structured to make all of these men potential suspects there is particular evidence that links Fleming to the crime or to the actual murderer, his business partner Julian Wilde.



The relationship between the two partners, as it is characterised in the rest of our scene, their first together, is an interesting mixture of contrast, parallel and mutual regard. Differences are quickly established: the complementary skills that they bring to the business, their comparatively different ways of relating to women. Similarities are also insisted upon: through the editing and framing of the reverse field cut conversation which emphasises that the partners have taken up symmetrical positions, and opens up a visual parallel between them in both wider and closer shots in this sequence, a strategy that is repeated in the views we see of them in their last meeting in the prison interview room.

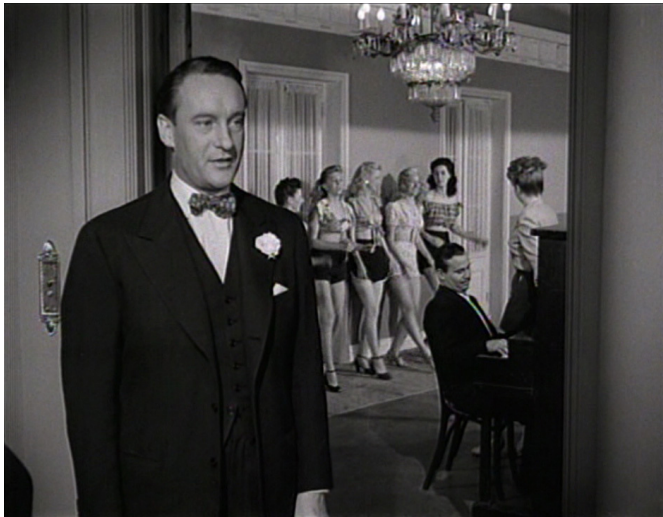
The closeness of their intertwined lives is revealed as the story unfolds. They do not only work together, they live in the same house, share the same housekeeper, are mistaken for each other, and are so closely related that Fleming can be convincingly framed with the mass of circumstantial evidence. There is also the intriguing coincidence at the Ionian Hall when Fleming and Wilde surprise each other on arrival, and the film makes it deliberately difficult – through a certain hesitation in each performance – for us to determine which of them might be ‘Music Lover’, subsequently playing further on this uncertainty. (The moment when Fleming, at the nightclub later in the same evening, asks Sandra whether she has considered



the possibility that he might be ‘Music Lover’, unaware of the full implications of the question or her affirmative reply, is a skilful example of the way the film sides us with Sandra in her investigation, and of the way in which her investigation and her romance are dangerously interwoven.)

Is it possible to suggest that at a poetic level there is more to the relationship between the two men than the fact that they live out of each other’s pockets? To be ‘doubled’ in the full dramatic, psychological, sense, one character needs to enact the unacknowledged desires of the other. What we can certainly claim is that Wilde’s behaviour is the corollary of Fleming’s attitudes: Wilde takes to its logical extreme the tendency to objectify which is everywhere apparent in Fleming’s behaviour. Perhaps, in this light, we can a bit more pressure on the timing of Wilde’s first entrance: does Julian appear in response to Robert’s frustration? Is it a coincidence that Wilde appears just at the moment when the woman Fleming has been talking to fails to fit in with what he wants?

There is also some interesting evidence to consider in the conclusion of the scene. As Wilde reads aloud from the newspaper about the poet-killer, Fleming throws open a further door which leads directly on to the rehearsal room where ‘the pretty little girls’ are auditioning. (The decision to construct the set in this way was not a cheap one: the perspective which the



film thereby achieves on Fleming was clearly important to Sirk and his collaborators.) While we are looking at Fleming standing in front of this setting we hear him dismiss Wilde's voiced concern at the fate of the eight women feared victims: "You're too sentimental. The eight little darlings probably ran off with professional charmers who promised them the riches of the Orient. You don't understand women, old boy." The film offers us an element of dramatic irony here, because we know that this is exactly the sort of promise that has lured Lucy Barnard to her demise. In retrospect, we can see that Wilde does – in these extremely limited terms – 'understand women': perhaps he has learnt his technique from Fleming after all.

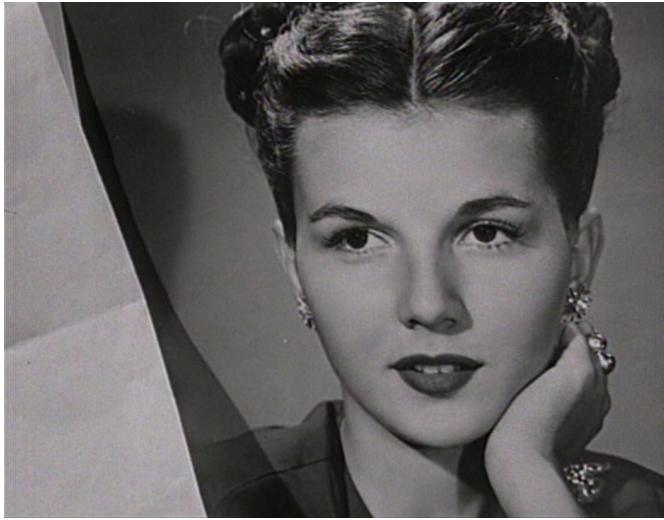
Behind Wilde, in the reverse shot, we can see two of the framed photographs of young women which are such a feature of Fleming's surroundings. In a later scene it is possible to see eleven separate framed portraits in Fleming's office, while never gaining a view of the whole room. It is worth taking a moment to reflect on the extraordinary prevalence of these 10 x 8 glossy prints, which we see in particular locations: Fleming's office and Fleming's den, but also the police station. Are all the poet-killer's victims trying to break into show business? That would be the main reason for their having photographic studio portraits readily to hand. The other partial explanation, one that would account for Fleming's collection, if not that of the



murderer/police, and supported by evidence from elsewhere in the film, is that getting girlfriends through the theatrical business appears to be Fleming's *modus operandi*. The two purposes are condensed in the telephone call with Sandra and elsewhere: even when in the less familiar surroundings of the concert at the Ionian Hall, he talks about the women he is hoping to meet as 'talent'. (Perhaps also reflecting his own particular understanding of romance, Wilde replies by saying that the concert hall will provide no 'hunting ground' for Fleming.)

One of the two portraits in the shots of Wilde may well be of the woman who has slammed the door moments before – it is difficult to be sure because the plane of focus is on Wilde rather than the background – the woman in the picture certainly wears her hair in the same way. But it could equally be a photograph of Arlette Tomlinson, one of the murder victims whose strikingly similar portrait Temple shows Sandra in the next sequence. Whether this is another unlikely coincidence or not, we can reflect that the two women (or three, if the portrait is of yet another person) aspire to similar fashion ideals, and similar ways of presenting themselves.

All the film's men, tarred by the brush of the murderer, share a mind set, and a way of seeing, and the women in the film largely accede to the ways of presenting themselves that this way of seeing dictates. Lucy calls herself 'Blue Eyes' in her



correspondence with 'John'. The women in the portraits in Fleming's office and the women who have been murdered all seem to be inspired by the same styles of dress and coiffure. Even Sandra, despite her resilient wit and ability to hold her own amongst the various perils of the investigation, seems to know and pragmatically accept the rules of the game. Certainly, she's not overwhelmed by the romantic skeletons in Fleming's cupboard.

One of the film's first images, the taxi dance, provides a picture of masculine/feminine relationships which resonates through the rest. By its nature a taxi dance is analogous to, and only a couple of steps away from, prostitution, and the detail of the first scene at the Broadway Palladium does nothing to contradict this. The men's sense of their proprietary rights — what they have bought for their dance ticket — extends to the conversation of their dance partners, as is clearly revealed when Sandra and Lucy try and speak to one another. When Oswald Pickering asks 'whose paying for this dance, I'd like to know?' he is resisting behaviour which demonstrates the independent volition of his dance partners, and wishing to preserve a fantasy that does not acknowledge the true feelings, or identity, of the women. As argued earlier, Oswald Pickering and the organisation of which he is a customer are in important ways representative of the characters and society we subsequently

encounter. All in all, this is a pretty bleak picture, and one that our pleasure in Sandra's individual successes, and the strong comedic element of the film's mode, cannot disguise.

The tone and precise generic identity of *Lured* present an interesting conundrum: it is amongst the jolliest serial killer films one is likely to see, its comedic elements emanating from decisions around casting, and particularly from the character constructed by Lucille Ball.⁵ Perhaps we can make headway by returning to thinking about narrative structure. On the one hand it is a crime movie, the story of an investigation, and a film where the heroine starts off investigating a crime (by means of investigating a series of men) and ends up investigating one man in particular. Many years before second-wave feminism inspired subsequent attempts to reconceptualise crime stories with women in the central investigative role — *Coma* (Michael Crichton, 1978), *Blue Steel* (Kathryn Bigelow, 1990) — *Lured* intelligently reworks the framework of this kind of narrative. But in terms of the broad structures of point of view, the film's narration does not share the typical structure of most detective stories, where we either experience the events of the film with the central character, or where the detective (perhaps because he is narrating the story) knows the outcome when we do not. Neither is it a crime story where the audience's greater knowledge than the characters is systematically used to generate suspense (there are a couple of moments, but this is not attempted in a sustained way). Rather than play the story wholeheartedly as a melodrama of action, the mystery is combined with other emphases which we tend to associate with the melodrama of passion: a female protagonist and a tendency to encourage us to look for the forces that may be shaping a character's behaviour.⁶ At the same time, the film is unlike a melodrama of passion in that — perhaps partly because its heroine is able to take action — it does not share the participatory anxieties of the melodramatic mode. (The comedic elements of the film's construction also prevent the melodrama from becoming too powerful, although a number of situations in the film could, with a little shift of register, push the film into a different mode. The gothic melodrama is never very far away, and at the point of Sandra's engagement, and in some of her earlier encounters with troubled patriarchs, the film almost heads into the territory of the 'persecuted wife' melodrama,

where the heroine marries a man who subsequently turns out to have unnoticed and unwelcome depths or designs.) Perhaps what we have here is a crime film that has been combined with tropes of the melodrama of passion, including a female protagonist and a particular orientation of point of view.

For all her skill in interpersonal relationships and detective work, it is not suggested, I think, that Sandra is able to perceive the relationship between her fiancée and the other men in an ideological sense. Our broader perspective than Sandra's is achieved – as I hope the preceding discussion demonstrates – by means of *mise-en-scène* and through the film's narrative structure, both in the sense of its parallels and its juxtapositions. Even when directing a detective mystery, a comedy-thriller, Sirk is able to achieve a similar balance between the broader perspective of the audience and the narrower perspective of the character as we see in his earlier and later melodramas of passion.

Afterword on *Pièges*

Lured inherits some of the elements that make up this uncommon generic mix from the film of which it is a remake, *Pièges*, directed in France in 1939 by Robert Siodmak and starring Maurice Chevalier, Marie Déa and Pierre Renoir. In a number of respects the films are surprisingly similar. The score is by the same composer (Michel Michelet) and contains many of the same themes (including the song 'All for Love', 'Mon Amour' in the original). Major elements of the plot have been transferred to the new version, much of the dialogue and some of the character names are directly translated.⁷ Even the title sequence – a series of signs picked out by the beam of a torch – strongly resembles the earlier film. However, in simple ways which are actually very significant, and very relevant to the discussion of this chapter, *Lured* differs from its predecessor. A number of these differences are to do with direction, casting and performance, but the ones I wish to draw brief attention to are concerned with narrative structure.⁸

In *Pièges* the story moves straight from the first (and in this film, only) scene at the taxi dance, via a poster announcing the disappearance of her colleague, to Adrienne Charpentier (Marie Déa) being interviewed at the police station. In other

words there is no equivalent to our sequence in the original, no telephone call, no introduction to Fleming (called Robert Fleury, played by Maurice Chevalier) or Wilde (Brémontière – Pierre Renoir) until the scene at the concert. Nor is there any visit by the police to a literary expert, no analysis of the poem's Baudelairian qualities. In short, most of the elements of the film which I have been moved to write about are inventions of the remake.⁹

Among the changes effected in *Lured* is an increase in the degree of coincidence in the story, and not only as a result of the invention of the coincidences of the telephone scene. The encounter between Fleming and Sandra at the Ionian Hall becomes a coincidence as a result of the earlier telephone conversation – in *Pièges* the visit to the concert is the first contact between the Adrienne and Fleury, and our introduction to the latter. The unexpected encounter between Fleming and Wilde in the foyer, which helps cultivate the ambiguity over which might be the 'Music Lover', is another coincidence made possible by having the earlier scene introducing the partners – in *Pièges* there is no suggestion that either was unaware that the other was attending, and we encounter them for the first time sitting next to each other in the auditorium. Again, I would argue that this is not evidence of a failing on the *Lured*'s part, an excess of contrivance. The coincidence of Fleming turning up at the concert that evening and noticing Sandra allows him to become one of the suspects in the investigation with all the benefits previously described. Their chance encounter at Kenilworth square – business associate of Sir Charles recognises maid as she serves him port – also helps the film to develop the image of a house where every social level shares a paradigm on heterosexual relationships. (This is not the only sense in which the film offers a peculiarly Dickensian vision of post-war London.) In these, and the other ways – such as the timing of Wilde's first entrance – coincidences work to bring together narrative elements and insist upon a variety of deeper and non-literal connections.

4. Looking, talking and understanding: subjectivity and point of view in *Talk to Her* (2002)

Talk to her (*Hable con Ella*, Pedro Almodóvar, 2002) is a film of striking images and contentious actions; any serious account of the film needs to consider the attitude toward these that the film encourages its audience to take. *Talk to Her*, moreover, is a film explicitly concerned with point of view, in that it makes subjective experience and identification part of its subject matter. It therefore seems a highly suitable film to explore in relation to point of view as an area of choice for the filmmaker.

Talk to Her has a central focus on the friendship between two men and, at the same time, is constructed around two 'love' triangles with Marco (Darío Grandinetti) at the point of intersection. This chapter follows the emphasis of the film in that it mainly addresses the triangle that also includes the friendship – Benigno (Javier Cámara), Marco and their relationships toward Alicia (Leonor Watling) – and will say relatively little about Lydia (Rosario Flores) and El Niño (Adolfo Fernández). My investigation will build from the moment when Marco sees Alicia in the dance studio: if you have not seen the film, it would be wise to pause here and go away and watch it, for reasons readers who have seen the film will understand. The sequence begins one hour 28 minutes and 29 seconds into the film and lasts for two minutes and 30 seconds.

1. Out of focus shot of orange wall, light fittings, a plant; medium close-up, once Marco has entered
[A door opens from frame right and Marco enters in focus, in profile. He looks out of frame left. He closes the door.]
2. Wide-shot, Marco walks into room, from behind the camera off frame right
[He looks around. Our view is from the hall and so our view of the living room is restricted.]

3. Medium shot of wall with standard lamp and large print of Alicia's head on the pillow, photographed at the clinic

[A point of view shot.]

4. Close-up of Marco looking out frame right; a shuttered window is behind him

[Marco looks down, and then round at window. He walks to it and begins to draw the blind.]

5. Medium-shot; reverse from the street

[Marco is already looking off frame lower right as the blind comes up. He steps onto balcony, continuing to look off lower right.]

6. Long shot of dance studio from a distance, and on a angle consistent with Marco's gaze

[Dancers dance.]

7. Varies: medium close-up – medium-shot, camera within dance school

[Close view of female dancer as she pirouettes, she and a male dancer further away from the camera (out of focus) dance, eventually out of frame left. The camera adjusts and refocuses to catch another five stepping into the space the others had filled.]

8. Medium close-up of Marco on balcony; similar position to 5, but closer

[He continues to look searchingly off frame right.]

9. Same set up as 6

[Foreground full of dancers, Alicia can (just) be seen on crutches making her way across the far wall of the studio.]

10. Same set up as 8

[Marco looks.]

11. Closer shot on same axis as 6



[Through the distortions of the glass we can see Alicia sitting in an orange plastic chair as a gaggle of dancers move from in front of her.]



12. Close-up of Marco: on similar axis to 8
[He opens his eyes in surprise.]



13. Close-up of Alicia; camera within the studio, much close view than that available to Marco, front on to Alicia.
[She watches the dancers with tears in her eyes.]

14. Begins as 12, but as Marco moves, the shot pulls focus to the picture on the far wall of the room

[Marco leaps inside the room and puts his back to the window.]

15. Close-up of Marco

[He is looking off frame (slightly left) which I take to indicate he is looking at the picture which we see in the following (and preceding) shots. He is breathing heavily.]

16. Close-up of photograph of Alicia

17. Long shot of dancers in studio

[Camera position and angle consistent with what can be deduced to be Alicia's viewpoint.]

18. Very similar, but not identical to 13

[Alicia looks on.]

19. Long shot, Alicia in studio

[This is shot against the light and Alicia is almost in silhouette. This is some time later: all the other dancers have gone. Katerina (Geraldine Chaplin) speaks off-screen and enters carrying mat.]

20. Aerial view of mat

[We can see the instructive images of exercises printed on blue matt. Alicia enters, after a pause, assisted by Katerina's hands. She looks past camera.]

21. Close-up view of Marco through window; not very

different from 12, but he is in one half of the window.
[He looks off-frame right, but from inside the room.]

22. Not as long as 6, not as close as 11

[Katerina exercises A. We watch through the window.]

23. Same set up as 21

[Marco continues to watch.]

The camera is inside the flat before Marco opens the door, but once he is inside, Marco has the advantage over us as he walks through the hall and into the bedroom. (Our view of the

apartment remains restricted: the revelation that Benigno has replicated the bedroom he saw in the magazine in its entirety is kept back for a later sequence.) We rejoin Marco in shot 3, by sharing his optical point of view, as he looks at the large photograph of Alicia's head on the pillow, her eyes closed. As if following a train of thought, he turns his head in one slow movement until he is looking at the window and then walks toward it (shot 4). As we watch him pull up the shutter in shot 5, the camera now outside the apartment facing back, he is already looking off-frame right, in the direction of the dance studio on the other side of the street, a shadow in the reflection of the facing building allowing us to see the direction of his gaze.

Shot six is a view of the studio consistent with the perspective available from Benigno's apartment, but rather than cutting back to Marco looking, which would complete a point of view figure, this is followed by a view of the dancers emphatically shot from inside the dance school. Shots 8, 9 and 10 collectively create a point of view figure, as do 10, 11 and 12 – 11 being the point of view shot in which Alicia is revealed and 12 capturing Marco's surprise at seeing her. However, we cut from this close-up of Marco wide-eyed, starting backwards, to a close-up of Alicia herself (shot 13). This is not an angled view shot on a long lens through the studio window, rather the camera is close to Alicia, squarely in front of her; we can see tears in her eyes.

We then cut to Marco (the same set up as the previous shot of him) who darts inside the flat and puts his back to the window, the camera pulling focus to the picture of Alicia on the far wall. This is followed by a reverse field cut to show Marco, his back still to the balcony window, looking off-screen in a direction consistent with the framed photograph, followed itself by a close-up of the photograph, which shows us Alicia's image but not the frame or the surrounding wall.

Rather than complete a potential point of view figure by returning to Marco, the film now cuts to another shot categorically within the dance studio. It is a long shot, showing a number of dancers at work, its backdrop one of the walls which we have not previously seen. This view of the studio is consistent with the view which Alicia must have from her chair. Indeed, the next shot is a close-up of Alicia, similar but not identical to shot 13, in which she looks past the camera, the

reverse field cut with eyeline match supporting the notion that the previous shot represents what she can see.

Shot 19 appears to be some time later: the room is now empty but for Alicia and the off-screen voice of Katerina. The only light comes from outside and the now distant figure of Alicia is almost in silhouette. It is another view categorically within the studio, and another angle on the space, looking back towards the windows through which Marco has looked in. Until this point the soundtrack had been dominated by the plaintive composition 'Alicia Vive', together with a few sounds specific to the space in which Marco inhabits (the door to the flat opening, the shutters going up, the clatter as he backs into the window). Now the music is combined with the conversation between Alicia and Katerina, who enters frame left with an exercise mat. This is subtitled as follows:

Katerina: I was so thrilled, Alicia, to see you coming in alone today, just with canes, on your own.

Alicia: Did you see?

Katerina: How was rehab today?

Alicia: Very good.

Katerina: Are you tired?

Alicia: Yes, very.

Katerina: Doesn't matter. We'll do some additional exercises. We'll do some leg stretches.

Alicia: I've done one hundred today already

Katerina: We'll just do a few more.

Shot 20, during which the end of this conversation takes place, is an aerial view of a blue exercise mat onto which, after a moment or two, Alicia lies down, on her back, assisted by the hands of Katerina. Alicia looks straight upwards. We then cut to a view of Marco looking through the window of Benigno's flat. This is followed by a shot of the studio from outside, similar to those earlier in the sequence, which preserves the angled view consistent with Marco's vantage point and through which we can see Katerina exercising Alicia's legs. Finally, shot 21 is the same set up as 19, and shows us more of Marco looking off-screen right. In these last three shots the only accompanying sound is the score.

We need to register the emotional power of this sequence, which can be lost in the dry forms of notation and description. Marco has just visited Benigno in prison, and arrived at his flat, which he is going to rent, for the first time. This of itself lends poignancy to the scene. Alicia's appearance is a breathtaking moment, coloured by the narrative situation, the actors' performances and Alberto Iglesias' emotive score, and the particular way in which her appearance is managed by the film.

The revelation of Alicia's miraculous recovery would be an important and potentially powerful moment in the film whichever way it was handled, but the decisions made by Almodóvar and his collaborators are particularly suggestive. Her entrance is carefully choreographed. In shot 9 Alicia, in a pale grey track suit top, can actually be seen making her way on crutches toward the seat on which she sits in shot 11, but she is difficult to make out, shielded by a cluster of dancers. When we return from the reverse of Marco, both shots tighter than the views previously available to us, the dancers launch into their routine and our view to Alicia sitting on a chair is suddenly cleared. The effect of the closer views is an increased intensity, that of the choreography an almost magical appearance.

One interpretation that the realisation of the sequence makes possible is that Alicia's appearance is in some respects a 'summoning up', a response to the wishes of Marco. What such a structure often implies is that the external world seems to be responding to the internal needs and desires of a character; it is an extreme dramatic form of wish fulfilment. The film has provided plenty of evidence to suggest that Marco does desire such an event. The first thing he did on discovering about El Niño's relationship with Lydia, and therefore the truth about his own – 'splitting up', as Benigno puts it – is to walk into Alicia's room and tell her that he is alone, single, lonely. When impressing on Benigno the impossibility of his marriage plans, Marco admitted that he 'likes' Alicia. And here he stands in Benigno's flat, where he knows the nurse used to watch Alicia before her accident and, seemingly inspired by the giant photograph of Alicia on the wall, he goes to take up that old perspective at the window. The intensity of his scrutiny, perhaps our own hopes of seeing Alicia restored to health, the ethereal turn of the music, conspire to make this a singular moment.

The achievement of the sequence, however, is that this sense of a 'summoning up', with its powerful evocation of Marco's experience, is only one of a number of perspectives which it holds in balance. Shot 12 gives us Marco's reaction on seeing Alicia, but the shot which follows does not confirm his and our brief sighting with another point of view shot. Rather, we cut to a close-up of Alicia which provides a very different view to that available to Marco: one which gives an insight into Alicia's emotional response which would be impossible to perceive from a distance. The shot allows us close to the experience of a character who has spent all of the film, with the exception of one extended flashback, in a coma. The comatose Alicia has been credited with many thoughts and emotions during the narrative: this is a rare opportunity to consider the real person.

Alicia's appearance carries a sense of hopelessness. Not only her tears suggest this, but also the way in which she sits, slightly unevenly in her chair, a little like a rag doll; her hair hanging loose, awkwardly cut, which contrasts with the way in which she wore it when dancing, and the way in which the other women dancing in this sequence wear their hair, in the habitual manner of ballerinas. Are her tears delight at being back, or dismay at what to her is a sudden transformation from grace to helplessness? Four years of her life have disappeared without trace, and she has not even the compensatory delight which her father and friends must share at her recovery.

Even before the close-up of Alicia, the camera had demonstrated its independence of Marco by moving inside the studio for a shot of the dancers at work. While the sequence gives us a series of views which replicate the line of vision of Marco, and thus clearly evoke his perspective, it has a freedom to show us the scene from completely different positions. The film succeeds in the difficult balancing act of evoking something as intense as Marco's experience of seeing Alicia while at the same time giving the spectator perspectives entirely independent of him.

The close-up of Alicia cuts to the shot in which we see Marco jump back inside the room (14), followed by a shot of him from the inside with his back to the window and then a reverse field cut to a close view of the photograph of Alicia on the far wall of the apartment. Marco's is an unusual response, even in circumstances of shock and bewilderment. Presumably

his flight is governed by a reluctance to be seen: an innocent response would be to stay and look. Perhaps his astonishment is coloured by guilt? He is, after all, taking on Benigno's role in things, both in the sense of supporting his friend and in inheriting his view from the window. Additionally, in giving us this close-up of the photograph of the supine, supremely passive Alicia – which is clearly what Marco is looking at, our sense of his eyeline in the preceding shot (15) strengthened by the pull of focus in the one before that (14) – rather than the awkward, alive Alicia outside, the film might suggest a momentary preference in Marco for controllable fantasy over reality.¹ Has Marco failed to listen to the old injunction to be careful about what you wish for in case it comes true?

The film's next decision is again not an obvious one. Rather than cutting to another shot of Marco looking off-screen, completing a potential point of view figure, in the next shot (17) the camera is back in the dance academy providing a view, itself not a point of view shot in the strict sense, which corresponds to Alicia's perspective of the dancers in the studio. Shot 18 gives us Alicia looking off-screen, evoking without cementing 17 as her viewpoint.

The film makes repeated use of what we might call a truncated point of view figure, where the power of the conventions to definitively identify a shot as representing the optical point of view of a character is refused in favour of an approach which, while drawing on the power of the eyeline match, is nevertheless less emphatic. This is a vital component in the balancing of viewpoints which the sequence achieves. It reveals to us what a character is looking at without drawing us too fully into their point of view in the wider sense. It is never ambiguous, but allows us to jump from one extreme of the space depicted to the other, and from the perspective of the character with whom we have been travelling, to that of another who we have never properly met before.

The next view, later in the day, comes from the fourth point of the compass, showing the darkened studio with the buildings on Marco's side of the street in the background. This again establishes a perspective that is decidedly not Marco's (even though, as we soon see, he is watching), and further develops the spectator's sense of Alicia's experience through the sound track which places us in the room with the women. The halting

movements of the two women in the empty studio contrast with the full, choreographed studio of moments of screen time before. Rather than take her place in the waves of synchronised performers, Alicia can only practice therapeutic exercises when everyone else is gone. The void between where she is where she would like to be, is clear.

Then we are given another close shot of Alicia as she edges onto the mat. She can barely move herself, needing almost as much manipulation at this stage of her rehab as she did when in a coma. As well as the contrast with Alicia's earlier self as we observed her, through Benigno's eyes, going through her points at the bar, we are also made aware of the differences between Alicia now and when comatose – the aerial composition here reminiscent of one of the defining views of her time in hospital, and several other images from that part of the film. When she was in a coma there was a self-contained quality to her appearance. She needed assistance for basic functions, yet there was something assured about her nevertheless. This impression partly resulted from the contrast between her first appearance and the pained somnambulism of the dancers of *Café Muller*, but it also stemmed from the contrast between her passivity and the various human casualties that moved around her. Now, she has to face again all the difficulties and possibilities of life, and from a position very different from where she left off.

The sequence finishes with a point of view figure: Marco watching from inside the apartment, the two women viewed through the angled glass wall of the studio. This makes it clear that Marco has returned to, and stayed, watching the real Alicia, but coming after the conversation between the women which is now denied us (we aurally are returned to Marco's space as well as visually) the limitations of his view are clear.

We can deepen our account of what is going on here by referring to the dimensions or axes of point of view identified by Douglas Pye (2000). In the sequences immediately prior to this one we have been closely aligned to Marco on the cognitive axis: since he made contact with Benigno we have experienced the film in the company of his character and before Alicia's appearance are united in our ignorance at her recovery. (This is not to say that we are entirely aligned with Marco in these terms even in this sequence – as mentioned above, the view we have of the flat is less than his, but we know Benigno's decorating

plans when Marco does not.) In broad terms, in the part of the sequence before Alicia appears we are also placed closely to Marco on the spatial axis: we are in the flat with him or hovering in the street, in close proximity to the flat, watching him in the doorway of the french windows; we hear what he can hear; we share his optical point of view in a series of point of view figures. But in shots 13, 17 and 18 a shift on the spatial axis of point of view, moving us away from Marco into close physical proximity to Alicia, makes possible a shift on the cognitive axis: we are aware of Alicia's experiences and feelings in a way that Marco cannot be. Shots 19 and 20, later in the day, continue to place us closer to Alicia than Marco on the spatial and cognitive axes, which has the effect of distancing us from Marco's point of view in the most general sense. When we return to him for a point of view figure, and are realigned with him on the spatial axis, the evaluative dimension of our relationship with him may have shifted as we recognise the limits of his perspective. In short, the film's play with these variables should have an impact on how we view Marco in evaluative terms.

Another interest of the sequence is that it disrupts the structures of looking identified by Laura Mulvey in 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', that have been such a feature of the academic discussion of film ever since. The process of drawing the spectator into identification with the hero where we look with him at the female figure which is thereby objectified, is subtly challenged by the sequence.² The sequence breaks away from Marco twice: once immediately after the point of view figure which reveals Alicia's appearance and his reaction to it, to give us the closer view of Alicia (Shot 13) which evokes her feelings, her subjectivity, for the spectator and which privileges us over Marco, who is excluded from these perceptions; secondly when Marco retreats into Benigno's room to consider the passive image of Alicia and at the moment where the third shot of the point of view figure would cement our perspective with his, we cut to Alicia's view of the studio and then another close-up of Alicia (17 and 18). Instead of being sutured into the masculine process of looking, we leap away to the viewpoint, the space and, in the following shots, the hearing of the living person on the other side of the street. An invocation of Mulvey's argument here also helps to explain Marco's dash for privacy. The wished-for object of his gaze has suddenly proved

– on her unexpected appearance – to have greater autonomy than he was wistfully anticipating.

The living Alicia is contrasted, therefore, with Benigno's image of Alicia, fixed in time, passive, framed. The photograph captures for the sequence the unchanging image of the suspended Alicia, and in a way which defines it explicitly as Benigno's view: his photograph (we presume), his enlargement, his bedroom wall. Benigno's problems partly arise from the fact that his obsession with Alicia was born from the limited perspective available from his apartment: he grew fascinated watching her dance from his window.³

Benigno's saving grace is that, unlike the poet-killer of *Lured* in his relations with women, Benigno does credit the comatose Alicia with personality and individuality. He is unaware that his view of Alicia is extremely limited and has imagined that his care for her is reciprocated, but he cherishes the few facts he knows about her interests, and not only finds ways of pursuing them on her behalf (the autographed print of Pina Bausch, for example) but has moulded himself in her image, and has thereby developed a fulfilling cultural life. His love may be profoundly unrequited, and predicated on fantasy rather than reality, but he credits her body with consciousness when nobody else does – a faith that is in part vindicated. To accuse him of being a psychopath, as Alicia's father and medical officer do, is to miss the point.

The film employs a number of strategies that ensure Benigno remains a sympathetic character despite his crime. One is the invention of *Amante Menguante* (*Shrinking Lover*), visualised for the audience as Benigno recounts the film to Alicia, which enables *Talk to Her* to avoid showing the impregnation. Another is through his friendship with Marco: in the qualities of the relationship, in similarities between the men which make Benigno seem less extraordinary, and in comparisons between the two which sometimes work in his favour. Marco is charismatic, sensitive and attractive. He is something of an outsider (Argentinean, a travel writer often abroad) and we discover much about the world of the film in his company. All these factors are likely to encourage us to perceive him as a sympathetic character, and so the very fact of his friendship with Benigno benefits the latter by association.



Moreover, Benigno possesses qualities that are absent in Marco. The remoteness between Marco and Lydia is continually revealed in Marco's behaviour towards her at the clinic, most obviously his inability to touch or talk to her, and this is contrasted not only with El Niño but also Benigno, and reinforced through the composition of images which use the structuring shapes of the window frames of Lydia's room to reinforce the comparative distance between the characters. Benigno's characterisation of the Lydia/Marco relationship on hearing of its demise – 'There was something in your relationship, forgive me, that didn't work' – seems to be confirmed by the evidence presented by the film, and perhaps so too is his earlier advice to 'talk to her'. In such ways the comparison between the two men, and their respective behaviour toward their sleeping 'lovers', sometimes tells against Marco and for Benigno. Following from this last point, there are qualities evident in Benigno's behaviour – caring, devoted, enthusiastic – which allow us to be generous toward his relationship with Alicia before we know of the rape and, in conjunction with the other elements discussed above, make us less likely to harshly judge him when we do.

In some ways Marco's behaviour might be felt to be the more perverse. Benigno at least had one conversation with Alicia before the accident. We spend a lot of the film considering Benigno's relationship to Alicia to be an imaginary one, both in the sense of the imagined reciprocation of love, and in his hopeful belief in the existence feelings and human life in someone in a vegetative state. Yet Marco is in a similarly deluded situation: he believes Lydia is in love with him (and was too busy talking *at* her, when she was conscious, to hear that that this was not, or no longer, the case). Marco's relationship

with Lydia has further similarities to Benigno's imaginary one with Alicia. Both men admired the women from afar before speaking to them, and both won the confidence of the respective woman by performing a service for her: finding a wallet or killing a snake. The opening sequence, in retrospect, suggests a further parallel between Benigno and Marco in their relationships with women: Benigno goes to watch Pina Bausch so he can talk to Alicia about it; Marco cries because he cannot share the beauty of what he has seen with Angela (Elena Anaya). If Benigno is living in an imaginary relationship frozen in a conversation four years ago, Marco is dominated by his recollection of a relationship finished more than ten years before. The sequence of Alicia's return, with Marco explicitly walking in Benigno's footsteps, is therefore only one example of a number in the film in which Marco invests in ways of behaving we associate with Benigno.

The moment when Marco talks to the comatose Alicia takes place at the beginning of the longest take in the film. It begins with Marco coming into the room, sitting down by Alicia and telling her that he is alone. Only the lower half of Alicia's body is covered by a sheet and the room is otherwise empty; Marco has left the door open, but the propriety of his behaviour is certainly likely to be questioned by the audience. He admits as much himself by starting when Benigno suddenly comes into the room and the frame. Benigno says, 'Admit it, you were looking at her breasts', to which Marco replies, 'It's hard not to, they're getting bigger.' The steadicam shot, which contains considerable movement and reframing, goes on to capture Benigno and Marco discussing the end of Marco and Lydia's relationship, but also, when Rosa (Mariola Fuentes) has entered the room and Marco left, the conversation about Alicia's late period. In linking the first action and the last, the shot draws on the inherent potential of the long take to imply a connection between the different elements it includes, suggesting a relationship between Marco's desires and Benigno's actions.

So, too, does the dramatic logic of the 'summoning up'. Marco may wish Alicia alive, but it is Benigno whose actions succeed, in a macabre version of *Sleeping Beauty*, in waking Alicia from her endless sleep in *El Bosque*. Marco, the film's ending suggests, is going to be a romantic beneficiary of this – not so Benigno. This is not to say that the film lets Marco get

away unscathed, the film develops critical perspectives on his behaviour, as an examination of the scene in which Marco first claps eyes on Alicia – which bears intriguing similarities with the scene of her return – reveals.

Following his arousal from sleep, waking from dreaming about kissing Lydia, Marco is making his way down the corridor to visit Dr Vega (Roberto Álvarez), when he slows to look through a door that stands slightly ajar. We watch him through the opening as his face registers surprise and he pushes the door further open. We cut to share his optical point of view:



the door continues to open revealing Alicia lying on the bed, partially naked, a blanket draped across her waist, its folds and her reclining pose evocative of a classical nude such as Lely's portrait of Nell Gwynne or Trutat's *Reclining Bacchante*.⁴ Beyond Alicia's bed we can see Rosa, facing the wall, putting on some surgical gloves.

Marco is looking at the unconscious, naked woman when she opens her eyes. We cut to a shot of Marco starting at this, which closes the point of view figure, and he moves quickly away from the door. In the reverse that follows, which is the same set up as the point of view shot, we see and hear Benigno tell Rosa to shut the window-door because there is a draft, notice that Alicia has opened her eyes, close them and then close the door on our watching camera. We, but not Marco, are treated to their conversation:

Benigno: She's opened her eyes.

Rosa: That gives me the creeps.

Benigno: And when she yawns?

Rosa: I shit myself.

As Marco pushes the door, and leading up to and including the moment when Alicia opens her eyes, we can hear a sound that might be the wind. Indeed, Benigno notices the draught moments later, but the sound adds something preternatural and mysterious to the occasion. The rational explanation that we are presented with comes after Marco has left the scene; neither is he party to the earthy conversation about Alicia's unconscious bodily functions.

There are several correspondences between this sequence and the scene of Alicia's return. On both occasions we share a problematic (in this case, specifically voyeuristic) point of view shot with Marco. On both occasions Alicia might be said to respond to the gaze and desires of Marco but in ways which surprise both Marco and the spectator and which assert Alicia's aliveness, her lack of passivity and her independence of the perspective levelled at her. On both occasions Marco reacts by flight. On both occasions we are then given perspectives that are not available to him.

Our experience of this moment is likely to be uncomfortable: both anxiety lest Marco should get caught, and concern about the motives and ethics of his behaviour. In fact the episode is structured as a rebuke to Marco – and perhaps by extension us, as we join him in his looking – rather like the little dramas which sometimes rebuke L. B. Jeffries (James Stewart) and the spectator of *Rear Window* (such as the discomfort of the newly-wed couple at the presence of their landlord, and their closing of the blind, just before Stella (Thelma Ritter) accuses Jeff of being a 'window shopper'). If the surprise of Alicia opening her eyes is not challenge enough to his and our gaze, then he and we are rebuked a second time a few minutes later when Marco again pauses outside the room, on his return from Dr Vega, and this time Benigno looks back into the camera providing Marco's point of view shot and orders him into the room.

Notably, and in contrast to Marco, Benigno then displays behaviour in relation to Alicia that treats her as a subject rather than as an object, explaining to her that this is the man who cried at *Café Muller*. Just before he does this, he applies drops to Alicia's eyes while telling Marco that he remembers that he had cried watching the performance. Benigno talks about the crying just as he applies the eye drops, and the film gives us a



close-up of the action, with liquid running down Alicia's face, at exactly this moment.

In a sense Benigno is animating Alicia, and the film seems to collude with him in this, giving weight to this notion in the way the sequence is put together. As well as highlighting Alicia's 'tears', the film also triggers a sympathetic moistening of its spectators' eyes, the symptomatic response we give when watching someone else's eyes being made to water. (I suspect Benigno's actions have the same effect on the spectator in the room, Marco: Grandinetti does blink four times a few seconds of screen-time later.) This moment takes the film's play with identification a stage further, encouraging from its audience a physical act of sympathy with an unconscious character.

Benigno's complaint

When Marco visits Benigno in prison for the first time, Benigno tells him about how important his travel books have been to him. As the subtitles record it:

I've read all your travel guides. It was like travelling for months with you at my side, telling me things no one tells you on journeys. My favourite is the one on Havana. I really identified with those people, who've got nothing and invent everything. When you describe that Cuban woman leaning out a window by the *Malecón* waiting uselessly, seeing how time passes and nothing happens ... I thought that woman was me.

As Benigno is telling Marco this we are given a two shot, but one which is so composed, with the reflections of the glass



partitions in the visiting room so organised as to superimpose the talking Benigno over the silent and still Marco.⁵ The effect is almost that Benigno animates Marco's image: a suggestion that gains power by being juxtaposed with the conversation in which Benigno describes how he has imaginatively identified himself with the people described in the book, and imagined himself into the position of a protagonist in reading the travel guide. This is another example of Benigno identifying incorrectly, of writing himself into a story where no protagonist is required. In addition, Benigno identifies himself with a woman glimpsed by Marco on his travels: somebody fixed, viewed by his travelling protagonist. 'I thought that woman was me' – this last line is given greater emphasis by being the final action of the sequence.

Significantly, a copy of Marco's guide to Cuba (with a photograph of what might be the waiting woman on the cover) appears among the possessions we see in the sequence of images which accompany Benigno writing his last letter, which are shown to us as Marco reads it. The book is alongside a photograph of Benigno's mother and a smaller version of the photograph of Alicia's head on the pillow. The inclusion of this image in such company, among the women most important to him, is further evidence of what is emerging as Benigno's fatal flaw: that he is someone who identifies too much, too strongly; that his identification becomes almost completely a projection of himself.

A psychoanalytic reading would need to draw on the other element that is brought together in the sequence of images: his mother's wedding photograph, torn to remove the husband/father, and the wider elements of the film to which it refers. Such a reading might argue that the root cause of Benigno's

problems is that he never fully achieved separation from his mother, and consequently cannot distinguish easily between where he ends and another begins. Benigno's behaviour, and much of the film's other imagery, would support such a diagnosis. Consider the relationship between Benigno and his dependent mother (her incapacity, the film suggests, psychological rather than physical) and how that relationship might then have been transferred to Benigno's ways of relating to Alicia, both by means of the mother's offscreen presence as he watches Alicia (from what is, after all, his mother's flat: even after her death the same photograph appearing prominently in shots of Benigno watching from the window), and by the transference of Benigno's role from housebound carer for his mother, after her death, to carer for the now bedridden and supremely passive Alicia. Such an argument would help explain why Benigno finds *Amante Menguante* so disturbing, particularly the concluding action of the film (where the hero, having been rescued from miniature adult life at the home of a 'terrible' mother, climbs bodily into the vagina of his sleeping lover and stays inside her forever), which seems to trigger his attempt to make love to Alicia (it is not suggested that Benigno has behaved like this on other occasions). Pertinently to this chapter's broader discussion, a clinical diagnosis along these lines would account for Benigno's tendency to live vicariously, in this example of the travel guides, but also in the way he has adopted all his enthusiasms from Alicia. The failure to recognise the boundaries between himself and others might also explain why Benigno finds a world without Alicia so terrible to comprehend. Ultimately, Benigno takes his identification/projection not only to the extent of rape but also to suicide or, as he tells himself, to a coma in which he can be with Alicia.

Conclusion

The film's ending – in the title 'Marco y Alicia', in the imagery from the stage where a young couple in Pina Bausch's *Masurca* break off from the group and begin to get to know each other, and in Alicia's closing smile – suggests a new relationship will form from the desolation of the preceding action. What makes this a more promising prospect than the (pre)history of Marco's feelings for Alicia might suggest, is that this is a moment when

Alicia and we are privileged over Marco. We see her notice Marco crying at *Masurca*. The sequence begins with a close-up of her looking past the camera, the eyeline match leading to a view of the back of Marco's head (the film then cuts to the action on stage, again refusing a point of view figure), and we subsequently see her looking with interest at Marco in the foyer, both events occurring before he realises she is in the theatre. Alicia herself, then, has the chance to desire, rather than merely be the desired object of others. And Marco, at least, is someone who likes both Pina Bausch and travel independently of knowing Alicia's interests – his views on silent cinema are never revealed.

This sequence not only evokes the opening, it also calls to our minds the two occasions when Benigno told Alicia about the crying man. When Alicia is attracted by Marco's tears, is she just struck by a sensitive, and handsome, man or is she unconsciously remembering Benigno's words from the time she spent in the coma? Does this suggest that she *could* hear things when in her vegetative state? The advice 'talk to her', given by Benigno to Marco and taken up by the film's title, is offered for the benefit of the person who will do the talking but perhaps, as Benigno believes, there is also a benefit for the listener. This is the crux of much of the film: where is the dividing line between a relationship which merely provides an opportunity for a person work out his or her own feelings on someone else and one which is genuinely communicative? When you talk to somebody, do you talk with them or talk at them? Do you look at somebody without their knowledge, or do you look at each other?

Talk to Her is a film which constructs a sophisticated and challenging structure of point of view for its audience. Not every film has one of its main characters in a coma, not many encourage sympathetic understanding for a nurse who rapes an unconscious patient in his care. Above all, this is a film which asks us not to make snap judgements about its characters. The situation is always more complex than we or the characters might presume: Angela turns out to have a more complex past than a young woman in bridal white is supposed to have (the film is not overexcited about this, it just is a fact); a female bullfighter is frightened of snakes; talking to the builders and getting a photograph framed turn out not to be the typical

activities of a young professional on his day off but elements of an extensive fantasy life; Marco's relationship with Lydia is revealed to be something other than he, and we, perceived it to be.

The generous perspective that the film encourages, slow to judge and quick to understand, is one of its key qualities. In the complex structure of narrative parallels, and as a result of the detailed organisation of the *mise-en-scène*, the film manages to be understanding toward its characters, and yet is able to be critical of them at the same time. Moreover, this is all in the context in which imaginative identification is a subject of the film itself. The film's organisation of point of view interacts with the subjects of the film: subjectivity, identification, the assumptions made as a result of a restricted viewpoint.

In discussing Marco's first encounter with Alicia at *El Bosque* I made a comparison with *Rear Window*, but it is also interesting to invoke Hitchcock's film in relation to the sequence of Alicia's return. Both films are structured around a tension between point of view shots from an apartment against independent views of who and what is looked at. Both achieve a complex play between the fantasy constructed from the limited view from the apartment and a reality which is indicated by deploying shots which are unmistakably views independent of the apartment and/or its inhabitants. A difference is that in *Rear Window* the fantasy is projected outside the window as a response to the pressing reality within, whereas in *Talk to Her* the fantasy is preserved inside the apartment (and on its walls), as though Benigno has collected impressions of the outside world and brought them back to the apartment to work over. If the apartment in *Rear Window* can be described as a projection box the one in *Talk to Her* is a camera obscura. Benigno is not just a man who projects himself imaginatively, he is simultaneously a *tabula rasa* or, perhaps better, a blank canvas, gradually coloured with selective details of Alicia's life and interests.

This comparison is also useful because it illustrates a shared interest in the tendency of a limited view, particularly in a character reduced to looking rather than taking part, being compensated for by the projection of the self onto the partial evidence available.⁶ But while the characters suffer from limited perspectives, the audience is not restricted in this way. In *Talk to Her* this is true of the broad organisation of the narrative, but

it is especially true in sequences such as Marco's first encounter with Alicia and the scene of Alicia's reappearance, in which the film vividly registers the experience of the limited viewer, but delicately provides us with other kinds of perspectives on the action.

5. What killed Ruthie Jean?: Architectural Design in *Candyman* (1992)

Kitty: Well all I know, there was some lady in the tub and she heard a noise.

Helen: Do you remember her name?

Kitty: I think her name was Ruthie Jean. And she heard this banging and smashing like somebody was trying to make a hole in the wall. So Ruthie called 911, and she said there's somebody coming through the walls. And they didn't believe her.

Henrietta: They thought the lady was crazy, right?

Kitty: Uh huh. So then she called 911 again, and they still didn't believe her. And when they finally got there she was dead.

Helen: Was she shot?

Kitty: No, um, she was killed with a hook. Tcshhhh! [Mimes ripping]

Henrietta: It's true. Yeah it is. I read it in the papers. Candyman killed her.

Kitty: Yeah but, uh ... [She winks, deadpan, at Helen] I don't know nothing about that. [She looks meaningfully at Henrietta (offscreen) and gets up to leave]

In a key scene from *Candyman* (Bernard Rose, 1992), Helen (Virginia Madsen) discusses the design of her apartment block with Bernadette (Kasi Lemmons), her collaborator in post-graduate research into urban legends. Following up the story told her by Kitty Culver (Sarina Grant) in the newspaper archives, Helen has discovered that 'Lincoln Village', the luxury apartment complex where she lives was built as a housing project, and that it follows the same template as the projects of Cabrini-Green, where Ruthie Jean lived and died. Before completion, the city planners, realising that this particular building was on the same side of the tracks as the more affluent parts of

town, made some cosmetic improvements and sold the units off as condominiums. Whereas at Cabrini-Green, as Bernadette puts it, 'the highway and the L-train ... keep the ghetto cut off'.

This means that the apartment which Helen shares with Trevor (Xander Berkeley), her lecturer husband, follows exactly the same floor plan as the one in which Ruthie Jean was murdered. And Helen is able to explain to Bernadette how the killer, or killers – 'they don't know which' – were deemed to have gained access. When the bathroom mirror/cabinet in these apartments is prised from the wall, the back of the corresponding unit in the neighbouring property is revealed. Helen even knocks out the cabinet from the (vacant) adjoining condominium to demonstrate her point. They both look through into the empty apartment. Bernadette teases Helen by pretending to have seen someone inside. The scene concludes with the two women repeating the name of Candyman while looking into the now reinstated bathroom mirror. Helen says it five times, the number which, when spoken while looking at one's own reflection, is supposed to summon the monster. Bernadette chickens out at four.



The decision to make an architectural parallel between the two apartments, between the floor-to-ceiling windowed luxury of Helen's apartment and the gutted, besmeared shell of Ruthie Jean's, is the one around which I want to structure this chapter's discussion. The connection between the two spaces is so central to the film's meanings that it may have been an 'informing' decision in the film's construction – it is fundamental to the film's organisation, development and significance, and it inspires a whole network or interrelated choices, from set

design to dramatic structure.¹ I will outline some salient points about the connection, drawing on some of these interrelated choices, before going on to explore them in more detail.

1. The apartment which belongs to Helen and the one formerly occupied by Ruthie Jean correspond to the two social strata that appear in the film, which in ordinary circumstances would not coincide: on the one hand, the world of Lincoln Village condominiums, of the University; on the other Cabrini-Green, Anne-Marie (Vanessa Williams) and her baby, the terror of crack gangs and zero opportunities. Helen only learns about an association between Candyman and Cabrini-Green because Henrietta Mosely (Barbara Alston) happens to be cleaning the room in which Helen types up her interviews after academic hours and overhears the name – in ordinary life, these two would be unlikely to come into contact.
2. Obvious from the film, but not so far from this account, the difference between these two worlds is not merely one of class, but also one of race. Henrietta and Kitty are black, as are all of the residents of Cabrini-Green that we meet, including Candyman (Tony Todd). The students and lecturers that we get to know are white, with the exception of Bernadette who appears to be mixed race. The film is keen to identify the colour bar which underlies the inequitable distribution of wealth and opportunity.
3. Contrary to appearances, these worlds are linked: this is what we can conclude from Helen's architectural research, and the relationship is developed by the film subsequently. The Gold Coast and the ghetto have been physically separated, but Lincoln Village both implies a social connection and embodies the historical and institutional act of establishing difference. The creation of an African-American underclass was an act of social repression, and Helen's apartment and its shadow, the apartment of Ruthie Jean, stand as the film's metaphor for this: parallel realities which co-exist, one 'repressing' the other.

4. In the scenes in the projects, the skyline of downtown Chicago is frequently present in the distance. The skyscrapers are always on the horizon but entirely out of reach to the inhabitants of Cabrini-Green, the wasteland between bearing out the effects of city planning discussed earlier in the film.²
5. These social concerns are interwoven with the legend of Candyman, in the way in which the inhabitants of Cabrini Green attribute Ruthie Jean's murder to the monster, but also in this scene through Helen and Bernadette daring each other to repeat his name in the bathroom mirror. Candyman does not respond to Helen's summons on this occasion, but later in the film he manifests himself in ways which turn on bathrooms and mirrors – and draw on the film's architectural parallel in their effect.
6. The social repression is answered by a return of the repressed: in the traditional manner of the horror film and in other ways. The architectural parallel serves to articulate connection between normality and monster.
7. Décor is an important element in the pattern of differences and relationships between the spaces on either side of the parallel. Helen and Trevor's condominium is characterised by white plastered walls and floor-to-ceiling windows but also by the decorative use of a series of artefacts from other cultures: masks and puppets from around the world, statues and objects of religious or other social purpose now divorced from their practical context. The flat formerly occupied by Ruthie Jean, however, is dark, gutted and indescribably filthy. Pushing further into the spaces of Cabrini Green, we encounter graffiti and – much later in the film – murals in a different style which seem to have an active devotional purpose.
8. The Lincoln village apartment is the setting for several scenes dramatising the deterioration of Helen's relationship with Trevor. These have a less direct relationship to the central axis of the film – one might describe them as a minor variation within the film's main theme – but are answered in the film's final scene which also takes place in the bathroom.

The next day, Helen and Bernadette's research takes them to Cabrini-Green, and the apartment formerly occupied by Ruthie Jean. Having gathered the courage to get past the gang of young men outside the building, who take them to be police officers, cautiously climbed two flights of stairs, and disturbed Anne-Marie, the next door neighbour, by photographing the graffiti sprayed across her front door, they reach the apartment. Once inside, Helen leads Bernadette through the layout, identifying features in common with her apartment. Additionally, similarities in framing and composition help to remind us of the earlier scene at Lincoln Village, and foreground the differences – where Helen's apartment is bright and airy, this is dark and oppressive.



They debate the wisdom of going further and, in opposition to the wishes of Bernadette, Helen climbs through the mirror/cabinet of Ruthie Jean's bathroom, into the apartment from which the attacker(s) approached. Climbing through another hole, beaten roughly through the cinderblock, Helen discovers, shortly after the audience, that the opening she has just climbed through forms the mouth of a picture of Candyman's head spray-painted on the other side of the wall. In the room Helen finds a pile of candy, a razor blade hidden within one of the pieces.

This is a sequence of extreme tension, both for characters and audience, but what is remarkable is that our disquiet is primarily generated not by the promise of the preternatural but by the vivid and disturbing realities of Cabrini-Green. 'What if someone's packing drugs in there? Are you just gonna apologise and give them your card?' asks Bernadette, trying to persuade



Helen not to enter the space beyond the mirror. Even if – as viewers of a horror film and not characters within the narrative – we have a greater sense of the likelihood of a supernatural explanation to Ruthie Jean's murder than Helen or Bernadette, the main source of our anxiety is the everyday horror of life in the projects rather than paranormal threat of Candyman.

Consistent with this emphasis on the social reality of the projects, the film's shocks at this stage are organised around the dynamic created by a pair of middle class women intruding into a community that is not their own. A good example of this is Anne-Marie's first appearance, accompanied by her guard dog, while Helen tries to photograph the graffiti sprayed across her front door. Anne-Marie's second appearance is even more suggestive. After Helen has climbed back into Ruthie Jean's bathroom, the women, and the audience, are startled by a figure revealed behind them in the reflection as the cabinet door is closed – but it is not Candyman, it is Anne-Marie finding out what is going on. She then berates them: 'You don't belong here lady! You don't belong going through people's apartments and things!'

These frights – and we could list others including the dog jumping up at the window on Helen's next visit to Cabrini-Green, and her encounter with the overlords in the toilet block – are all material in nature and hinge on the presumptions of turning other people's lives into a subject for personally rewarding academic inquiry. Helen is delighted to discover 'Sweets to the sweet' decorating the exterior of Anne-Marie's apartment, oblivious to the fact that it is rather less than 'great' to have such interesting cultural phenomena sprayed across your front

door. When Anne-Marie and her barking dog appear, the resulting surprise has the quality of pricking Helen's presumption. The second appearance of Anne-Marie contains a more explicit rebuke to Helen, and to audience closely following her enquiries.

While drawing attention to these aspects of Helen's behaviour, it is important to remember that she remains a compelling protagonist. She is at the centre of every scene in the film, and the visit to Cabrini-Green is constructed in such a way as to engage us emotionally in her experience. We arrive in the car with the two women and our first views of the gang outside the entrance to the building are shot from inside the car on a long lens. We then track with Helen and Bernadette toward



and through this hostile group, the majority of shots employing wide angle lenses which allow us a good view of the women but which keep the men at a distance. In the exploration of the apartments, views restricted (she walks into the darkness in the corridor leading to the bathroom) and privileged (the zoom out to reveal the picture of Candyman as she unwittingly steps through its mouth) both work to make us concerned for her. The very fears generated by the sequence are likely to further bind audience and character. The decisions that structure the sequence so as to convey Helen and Bernadette's experiences during the investigation also have the consequence of restricting our viewpoint to that of the middle class visitor: members of the audience are quite likely to accept some of Helen's assumptions and fail to anticipate her mistakes.

The encounters with Anne-Marie begin to challenge this limited view: in the admonishments already mentioned, but

especially when Bernadette and Helen follow her into her own apartment, beyond the vandalised exterior and into the home she has built for her son. Only now do we get to know something about one of the inhabitants of Cabrini-Green. This is also a scene in which we have an opportunity to be sceptical of Helen, suspicious that her interest in baby Anthony is only to further her enquiries. We may be struck that despite having just clambered through the filth next door, and despite the fact that Anne-Marie is nursing her baby, Helen does not take off her gloves to shake hands. Bernadette is more respectful of Anne-Marie than Helen, as she is of the dangers of Cabrini-Green, and this contrast helps to draw attention to some of the limitations of Helen's way of conducting herself.



The gulf between life in the projects and in the milieu of the university is powerfully underlined by the way in which the film concludes the first visit to Cabrini-Green. We travel from the last words of Anne-Marie's account of hearing Ruthie Jean's screams through the walls, and her fears for her own safety and that of her child, straight into an opulent restaurant, the cut momentarily preceded by a sound bridge of Professor Purcell's abrasive and ungenerous laughter, the fleeting impression being that this is a response to what Anne-Marie's has been saying.

Purcell (Michael Cuklin) is the supreme representative of the academic world. As junior figures in the department, Helen and Bernadette are condescended to by him: 'So how are our two most beautiful graduate students getting along, then?' The characterisation of Purcell, and Trevor's obsequious behaviour toward him, encourages us to see that there may be pressing reasons why Helen should want to gain a more elevated

position within her profession, why 'burying' Purcell would not only be very satisfying but perhaps valuable. Yet we may increasingly conclude that it is these sorts of motives that lead her to Cabrini-Green, rather than a disinterested thirst for knowledge or social justice.

Knowledge leads to power and power, in the academic world presented, leads not just to privilege, but to smugness. Purcell, whose status in the department is such that Trevor placates him at the expense of his wife, sits bullishly in the position that having written a paper on the 'hookman' ten years ago affords him, supremely self-satisfied. In the lecture theatre Trevor gets laughs at the expense of students who volunteer legends before revealing the phenomenon of urban folklore with a flourish. (Urban legends are a very well chosen subject of research for the film to centre itself on, not least because once the nature of such stories has been drawn to a person's attention, she or he is immediately placed in a very different relationship to the stories than when listening to or telling them uncritically – the awareness of an academic perspective immediately creates a superior position.) Even as graduate students, Helen and Bernadette share knowing winks and smirks at the expense of the credulous storytellers they interview.

Trevor clearly relishes the attention and respect that lecturing brings him – to the extent, we later discover, of having an affair with one of his most enthusiastic undergraduates. As Helen has become increasingly knowledgeable, and thereby increasingly empowered, it appears that Trevor has started a relationship with a younger woman, one who still has to look up at him. Helen's (and our) first introduction to the character of Stacey (Carolyn Lowery), the student concerned, coincides with Helen's discovery that Trevor has been teaching the freshman class about urban folklore before she and Bernadette have finished collecting legends from the students. Despite Trevor's appeals to his responsibility for the proper education of his students, we may suspect that he has organised his curriculum in order to hamper Helen's research, part of a broader resistance to his wife's growing status.

In the scene where Helen interviews Kitty Culver and Henrietta Mosely, the dialogue of which is transcribed at the beginning of the chapter, both the smugness and the presumptions that characterise the negative aspects of Helen's approach

to sociological research are there to be observed. In particular, elements of Virginia Madsen's performance suggest a superior, humourous disbelief which Helen cannot quite hide from Henrietta, and she starts guiltily when Henrietta insists on the truth of the story. Helen's behaviour contrasts strongly with the powerful seriousness with which Henrietta listens to Kitty, and with which Kitty signals that she is not to be quoted. It is also significant that if Helen does not hide her tape-recorder, equally she does not ask for permission to record the conversation. She sets it up while the women are entering the room, and it is quite likely that Kitty does not realise she is being taped.

These are quite subtle elements of the scene: the action of starting the tape-recorder is not emphasised with a close-up (although it is not in any sense hidden), Helen's behaviour – which is nothing more than a look away and down and a movement of the tongue – may only be interpretable because Henrietta realises Kitty is not being believed. They are not likely to prevent us from building our relationship with Helen, a process which has been accelerated in the previous scene at the injustice of Trevor's behaviour with the freshman class. But in the manner of many a horror film, subsequent events may lead us to reflect on assumptions made by the central characters which we too readily accepted at the time. We might also reflect, after having met more senior members of the faculty who display such qualities to a greater degree, that Helen has learnt this way of seeing with her subject, in her institution.

Purcell tells the women, the rest of the table and the audience, the historical story of Candyman.

The legend first appeared in 1890. Candyman was the son of a slave. His father had amassed a considerable fortune from designing a device for the mass-producing of shoes, after the civil war. Candyman had been sent to all the best schools and had grown up in polite society. He had a prodigious talent as an artist and was much sought after when it came to the documenting of one's wealth and position in society in a portrait. It was in this latter capacity he was commissioned by a wealthy landowner to capture his daughter's virginal beauty. Well, of course, they fell deeply in love and she became pregnant. Hmm. Poor Candyman! The father executed a terrible revenge. He paid a pack of

brutal hooligans to do the deed. They chased Candyman through the town to Cabrini-Green, where they proceeded to saw off his right hand with a rusty blade. None of them came to his aid. But this was just the beginning of his ordeal. Nearby there was an apiary: dozens of hives filled with hungry bees. They smashed the hives and stole the honeycomb, and smeared it over his prone, naked body. Candyman was stung to death by the bees. They burned his body on a giant pyre, then scattered his ashes over Cabrini-Green.

He tells it well, with some relish and no little skill, but from a distinctly knowing and self-satisfied narrational position – ‘Poor Candyman!’ This story of Candyman’s origins is one of the elements that make the film’s eponymous character sympathetic. Helen is certainly moved by the story, and the film encourages us to be as well. As Purcell begins to recount the violence inflicted on Candyman, the film cuts to a slow zoom in on Helen. The lighting in this set up is entirely different from the previous views of her in the sequence, and light falls softly across the middle section of her face, so that her eyes stand out from their surroundings. At the same time, Purcell’s voice is joined on the soundtrack by the sounds of the attack, the victim’s agony, and by Philip Glass’s score. The visual form of Helen’s eyes is picked up in the next shot – the eyes of the Candyman graffiti mural, caught in the flash of Helen’s camera. Although we are still listening to Purcell’s tale, we have cut to Cabrini-Green on the occasion of Helen’s next visit. Her eyes are again highlighted in the following shots as she looks over the top of her camera, and blinks away tears.³

In being sympathetic and, once we meet him, charismatic, Candyman embodies the characteristics Robin Wood finds central to monsters of the radical horror films of the 1970s. Wood argues that the central structure of the genre can be encapsulated in the phrase ‘normality is threatened by the Monster’, where normality describes a ‘conformity to the dominant social norms’, the monster embodies society’s fears, and the relationship between the two is predicated on the fact that the monster is a product of normality (Wood 1986: 79):

One might say that the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilisation

represses or oppresses, its re-emergence dramatized, as in our nightmares, as an object of horror, a matter for terror, and the happy ending (when it exists) typically signifying the restoration of repression. (Wood 1986: 75)



As Wood argues, however, the central mechanism of the genre provides plenty of room for inflection in terms of where our allegiance is encouraged to lie in relation to the monster and the society which it threatens. Our relationship to both monster and society in *Candyman* is characterised by the vital ambivalence which Wood suggests is fundamental to progressive or radical horror movies: *Candyman* himself is genuinely monstrous, frightening and does some horrendous things (the murder of Bernadette is particularly shocking), and yet in other ways he is sympathetic, attractive, charismatic, and *human*. As the viewer discovers, the film goes further in these terms than most horror films, in that it emphatically refuses a happy ending in which order is restored, and transforms its heroine into a monster herself.

Purcell's is the fourth of five *Candyman* tales which we will hear. All of the succeeding stories contrast strongly with the first, the version told to Helen by a student at the beginning of the film. For the white, middle class, university students, the *Candyman* story is an urban legend which turns on teenagers, particularly female teenagers, being punished for expressing their sexuality. In this context it has been transformed into a cautionary tale about the dangers of stopping being the good girl, told with customary ending to the urban legend: 'My, uh, my roommate's boyfriend, knows him [Billy, the survivor].' The character of *Candyman* has become divorced from his roots and from the urban experience, and now appears to terrorise the world of the American small town, rather the city. In the student-told version of the story, which we see visualised as the first action of the film, it has acquired the bland texture of the teenie-kill pic/1980's slasher horror film. The world of this story is the white-picket-fenced affluence of the middle-American small town, 'near Moses Lake, in Indiana.' The monster described embodies a return of the repressed, but in the form of a monster we are neither invited to know or to understand. Here the film invokes what Wood has characterised as the reactionary horror films which came to dominate the genre in the 1980s, where the monster is evil incarnate, inhuman, its role to punish expressions of youthful sexuality. *Candyman* alludes to this cycle, and then goes on to become something much more interesting.

The fifth *Candyman* story, told to Helen by Jake (DeJuan Guy), is the story of the attack on the boy in the public toilets. That story shares with the murder of Ruthie Jean, as told by Kitty Culver and later by Anne-Marie, violence which has no obvious cause, that randomly terrorises the residents, and which the police are unable or unwilling to respond to. In Cabrini-Green, people are reluctant to tell the story. It is something they are literally afraid of telling. Knowledge is connected to power in Cabrini-Green, too: the leader of the overlords is protected until Helen's arrival because of the reluctance of witnesses to speak out.

Helen's encounter with the gang in the toilet block brings the material trajectory of the film's horrors, and the first movement of the film, to a conclusion: following Jake's story and the graffiti trail into the intolerable stench and squalor of the toilet block, she meets a human, everyday version of *Candyman* – the leader of the overlords – who beats her senseless with the blunt side of a metal hook. Forty-three minutes into the film, however, after Helen has picked out the gang leader in an identity parade and recovered from the injuries he inflicted, the *real* *Candyman* begins to manifest himself, and to do so in Helen's parts of the city. The first of these appearances is in the university car park, just as Helen's academic ambition has been revived by Bernadette's news that their work is going to be published, and as Helen gleefully looks at the transparencies she took at Cabrini-Green which Bernadette has had developed. Helen's rational, middle class explanation of the murder of Ruthie Jean has sapped his potency: 'Your disbelief destroyed



the faith of my congregation. Without them I am nothing. So I was obliged to come.' Helen wakes to find herself deposited in Anne-Marie's bathroom, in a bloody situation where she is the prime suspect.

Candyman's precise timing may be a response to the threat of publication – an academic, rational explanation of the folklore of Cabrini-Green will do further damage to his status as an entity that thrives on fear and belief – but it is simultaneously triggered by Helen's renewed interest in her career after a period recuperation and domestic activity. The logic of the horror film is for the return of the repressed to respond to forms of behaviour which embody the assumptions of 'normality', of the dominant ideological patterns of the society depicted. Helen's glee at the thought of significant professional success precisely refers us toward the values that the film is calling into question, not least the confident claim to be able to understand and explain behaviour outside the waspish academic world. This is a suitably hubristic moment for the return of the repressed to announce itself.

After Helen's arrest at Anne-Marie's, and the indignities of her strip search, the shocking change in Detective Valento's (Gilbert Lewis) behaviour toward her confirms her movement from a witness who can speak because she is an outsider to Cabrini-Green – a middle class woman who can provide rational evidence – to somebody involved, compromised, suspected and only able to provide a supernatural explanation of events. She moves from a situation where her world view (and perhaps a sense of superiority over the inhabitants of Cabrini-Green) was confirmed by the detective and the identity parade, to one where this has collapsed and she is as irrational (from the police perspective) as any of the Cabrini-Green inhabitants. Helen begins a tourist and ends up the object of others' intrusive investigation.⁴ As an ethnographer might say, Helen's academic distance has collapsed.

The early scene in Helen's apartment is most emphatically answered when Candyman finally does smash his way through her bathroom cabinet. Helen is feeling particularly fragile: she has just been bundled out of the police station sheltering under an overcoat to avoid being photographed or filmed, having spent the night in the cells. Her confidence in her husband, who wasn't answering the telephone in the middle of the night,



has been damaged. Into the shelter of her apartment, through the intimate space of the bathroom cabinet, is suddenly thrust the bleeding and lunging stump of Candyman's hooked arm: her world is invaded by Cabrini-Green, in a form which vividly conjures up a history of racial oppression.

Moments before this explosive entrance, Helen has been projecting the slides she took at Cabrini-Green on her apartment wall, and has noticed Candyman's reflection in one of them. He is caught behind Helen in a shot showing her reflected in Ruthie Jean's bathroom mirror. This conjunction forms an intriguing double parallel: Candyman's appearance reinforces the link between the mirrors in the respective parts of town – he has answered Helen's initial summons after all, but in the parallel bathroom mirror – but also makes a connection between Candyman and Anne-Marie, who was reflected in this mirror on the occasion of Helen's first investigation of Ruthie Jean's apartment, and who in the shock of the moment we might have supposed to be Candyman. By the latter the film is not suggesting, of course, that Anne-Marie is herself monstrous. Rather, both she and Candyman offer a challenge to the comfortable certainties of Helen's investigation and of her broader world view. They both give voice to an African-American experience of which Helen is entirely ignorant. What Candyman's reflection in the photo also confirms is that Helen has unwittingly summoned up a monster not just by playfully calling his name five times but by the presumptions of her enquiries in Cabrini-Green, presumptions we may ourselves have gone along with.

Helen invokes not just a monster from tales around the campfire, or even the 'unselfconscious reflection of the fears



of urban society' as Trevor variously describes urban legends in his lecture, but a whole raft of experience which is kept at arms length at Cabrini-Green. In *Candyman* that experience intrudes where it is not expected, it refuses to fit into the comfortable academic certainties beloved of Purcell, and aspired to by Helen. As Candyman stands in the Lincoln Village apartment, against a backdrop of bookcases and carefully displayed artefacts, it is clear that he cannot be contained in photographs, or collected, or classified. In these moments – Anne-Marie's testimony, Candyman's visceral appearance at Helen's, to which we might add the funeral and the death of Dr Burke (Stanley DeSantis) – which challenge the order and decorum of the academic world, and of the broader white middle class for which it stands, a comforting veneer, like the plaster which has been applied to the naked cinderblock of Lincoln Village, is ripped away to reveal the uncomfortable truth underneath: that there

is an African-American underclass whose experience of late 20th century life is totally different from the white middle class hegemony.

In the closing stages of the film, Helen climbs through Ruthie-Jean's mirror once again. This time, the portal has grown so large that she can step through it, and the space beyond has grown beyond any naturalistic representation to the extent that Candyman's domain fills the whole width of the building, several stories high. The walls and the space are still full of rubbish and rubble but in addition to the graffiti, the walls are decorated with paintings representing the torture and murder of Candyman. The space also resembles a church, with an aisle bordered by columns formed by the steel frame of the building and paint sprayed across the windows giving the impression of stained glass. In this awful Wonderland Helen finds Candyman sleeping on an altar, and first attacks him but

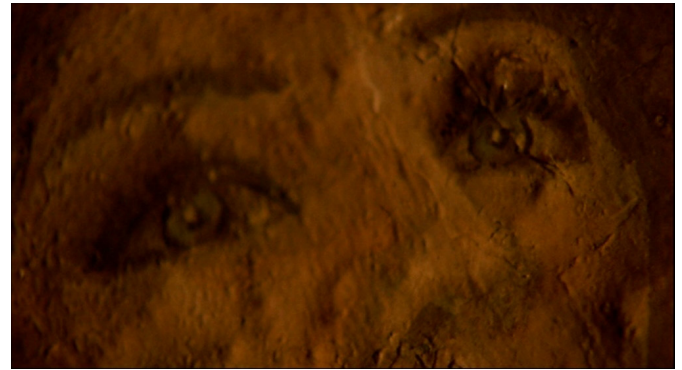
is then partially seduced by him, on the promise of the safe return of Anne-Marie's child.

Two major dynamics emerge in the later stages of the film. The first is the way Helen and the audience are moved away from the possibility of a return to 'normality'. Bernadette is murdered, Helen immured in a mental institution where she and we come suddenly to the chilling realisation that she has been under sedation for a month. When she escapes, her husband is revealed in his true colours as she gets home to find him and Stacey repainting the condominium in baby pink.

Candyman has a hand, or rather a hook, in much of this, committing the crimes for which Helen is incriminated. At first his motive seems to be to restore his reputation with his 'congregation', but gradually the prospect of a romantic relationship between the him and Helen begins to emerge – the second of the emphases which become central to the latter part of the film. Candyman demands 'one exquisite kiss' as he floats above the trolley on which she is restrained in the mental institution, and later, as he carries her toward the altar he promises: 'The pain, I can assure you, will be exquisite. As for our deaths there is nothing to fear. Our names will be written on a thousand walls, our crimes told, and retold, by our faithful believers. We shall die together in front of their very eyes, and give them something to be haunted by. Come with me and be immortal.' His attacks have the effect not of re-establishing his own reputation (except in Helen's and the audience's eyes) but rather establishing Helen's credentials as a monster – and suitable partner.

Candyman manages to make the prospect of ghoulish immortality quite attractive, not least because he has ensured that Helen has no possibility of returning to her previous life – as his disembodied voice reminds her, 'all you have left is my desire for you'. But when Helen succumbs to his embrace upon the altar, swarms of bees crawl and fly out of his mouth and rib cage and she faints. On waking alone, she finds her likeness illuminated on one of the murals depicting the murder of Candyman: it seems not just that Candyman wants her to join him in monstrous immortality but that she is some kind of reincarnation of his earlier love.

In certain respects the film has prepared us for these scenes. Helen's encounters with Candyman often replay the motif



of her gently highlighted eyes – in the car park scene, when Candyman begins to talk after she has attacked him, when she wakes on the altar – which was introduced as she listened to the story of his torture. When Helen finds her face on the walls of Candyman's lair, the eyes again feature strongly, the camera zooming to reinforce this through framing.⁵ And when, before the attack/embrace, she found the paintings of the assault on Candyman, the movement of her torch beam on his painted face achieves a similar effect, reminding us of the graphic match from her face in the restaurant to the eyes of the graffiti mural.⁶ This treatment, then, alerts us to a sympathy between Helen and Candyman, but the film now begins to suggest that Helen is destined to replay the post-bellum story by forming a new couple (and even a new family, with the abducted baby Anthony replacing the nascent child).

It is logical that there should be a sexual component in the film's return of the repressed as the original injustice perpetrated on Candyman was punishment for miscegenation. (Recognising this enables us to get a better analytical purchase even on the version of the story told by the university students, one in which a black monster murders a young white woman who has strayed from the socially approved forms of sexuality. In this context the Candyman legend has been turned into a cautionary tale about sexual behaviour more generally, but one which trades on a notion of an African-American 'other', racial stereotypes about black sexuality and the taboo of sexual relations between black men and white women.) Indeed, there is a sexual element to Candyman's appearances throughout the film: his strength and size, his handsomeness and charisma, the



quality of his tailoring, not to mention the phallic properties of his hook: ripping his victims, punching into bathrooms, lifting Helen's skirt in the seduction scene. The idea that Helen is the earlier woman reincarnated implies that similar social structures apply between the mutually exclusive 20th century social worlds explored in the film and the restrictive social structures that the upwardly mobile Candyman attempted to move between in the years after the civil war. Their relationship is another bridge between segregated social worlds.

Damagingly, however, Candyman's motives become increasingly unclear during the second half of the film. By a sleight of hand, the film has changed his stated reasons for appearing from being about the need to re-establish his credibility to a pre-destined romance. He had seemed intent on killing Helen in the apartment until Bernadette turned up. Almost imperceptibly, his mantra moves from 'Believe in Me' to 'Be my Victim' to 'Come with me, and be immortal' to 'It was always you'.

This becomes critical in the final scenes at Cabrini-Green where the gaps in logic become more difficult to accept – certainly, these passages do not seem to be able sustain the same level of scrutiny as the earlier parts of the film. What exactly is Candyman trying to do with baby Anthony, and why does he break his bargain with Helen? What is the difference between the death he seems to be planning for the three of them and the 'death' that Helen inflicts on him in the bonfire, or her death in the bonfire? What can 'dying together' mean if he is already dead? Why does he have to lure her out to the bonfire when he already appears to have won her consent the moment before the bees appear? One of the film's most remarkable achievements is the way its heroine steps outside 'normality' entirely and become a monster herself, but it is regrettable that the film is not able to offer us a monstrous couple at its end – Helen replaces Candyman rather than tempers his more despicable acts through their union. If my account of this part of the film is a little threadbare, it reflects a conviction on my part that this

area of the film is not so densely achieved and the ending not fully coherent.⁷

We have, however, been successfully prepared for the final scene in the bathroom. If there is no monstrous couple, the last sequence of the film gives us Helen-as-monster, and the destruction of a different couple, in the setting of the Lincoln Village apartment. The ending of the film reveals another pattern of damaging behaviour receiving its comeuppance – this time Trevor's. The earlier scenes charting his duplicity led to the moment when Helen discovers the lovers repainting the apartment: as well as being a sequence which eloquently demonstrates Helen's dismay at the betrayal, and the breaking of her ties with a compromised reality – 'Trevor, you were all I had left.' – it is also the occasion when Helen begins to try out her new monstrous persona, inspired by the frightened reaction of her husband and Stacey. A line she speaks on that occasion – 'What's the matter Trevor? Scared of something?' – is uttered again in the final scene as she appears behind Trevor, after he has lamented her name into the mirror 5 times, and ecstatically hacks him to death with Candyman's hook, leaving Stacey as prime suspect. The credits roll over a slow track toward a new mural, depicting Helen's death, behind the altar at Cabrini Green. Helen has gone native.

Conclusion

Candyman might be described as the *Imitation of Life* of the horror genre. In both movies architecture is central to the dramatisation of racial and economic segregation and the underlying relationships that such distinctions seek to deny. In this film, however, we don't just observe the blonde, career-building heroine's failure to recognise African-American experience: Helen is pitched into it in the most vivid way imaginable and, because it is a genuinely terrifying, carefully crafted, horror film, so are we.⁸ In the tradition of the genre she, and we, experience a return of the repressed/oppressed, but also in the best, and most radical, traditions of that genre we come to realise that the monster is not without qualities, and that her own world is compromised. In the battle between normality and the monster, the monster has – the monsters have – more of our sympathy.

Notes

Chapter 1

1 For further discussion of the commutation test, its usefulness in relation to casting and performance, and its origins in structural linguistics, see Thompson (1978).

2 *The Blank Wall* was initially published in an abbreviated form in *The Ladies' Home Journal*, and this is how it is referred to in the credits of *The Reckless Moment*.

3 I have followed Holding's spelling of Bee, which is also how Lucia spells her daughter's name in writing to her husband in *The Reckless Moment*. Judging by the material that Lutz Bacher quotes in *Max Ophuls in the Hollywood Studios* (1996), the production documents may refer to 'Bea'.

4 For a fuller account, see Robin Wood's article in *CineAction* (2002) which, provoked by the appearance of *The Deep End*, returns to *The Reckless Moment* and explores this sequence in particular.

5 For the record, the close-up was shot during retakes (Bacher 1996: 307).

6 The fact that all the city scenes involving Darby, Nagle or Donnelly take place in the same setting is eloquent beyond any necessity of financial economy. The parallel between Donnelly and Lucia is only enhanced by the fact that we saw her walking through these urban spaces in a markedly similar way in the first major sequence of the film. That this is also the phone box that Darby used to phone Bee is not without irony. And the fact that all the scenes of the L.A. underworld are played out in this same space enhances the film's play with its two locations, the genres which they evoke for the audience, and the sociological/psychological relationship between them.

7 The films ending also accentuates the parallel between its leads, when both Lucia and Donnelly are ready to sacrifice everything for the other. In terms of Donnelly's constraint, we might note the further irony that the phone call was not just designed to tell Lucia Nagle's demands, but was actually made at the insistence of Nagle.

8 In the novel we actually meet Nagle before Donnelly, but when Donnelly refers to his partner for the first time Lucia suspects him of playing 'the oldest trick in the world' before realising that he is talking about Nagle. (1947, 2003: 61)

9 In the context of *The Reckless Moment* these areas, including the idea that Donnelly acts as a return of the repressed, are discussed by Britton (1976) and Michael Walker (1982b). In *The Blank Wall* Lucia does not offer to go to the police – in fact, she is much more active in trying to evade the police than Donnelly who has slipped into a fatalistic mood after killing Nagle.

10 In the novel Sybil is a character rather like Annie (Juanita Moore) in *Imitation of Life* (Douglas Sirk, 1959), in that Sybil's abilities and labours support the successful façade of Lucia's household, but Lucia knows nothing about her. When she and we learn a little more about Sybil, it transpires that she has held a life-long desire to travel the world, and her husband was jailed in dubious circumstances after fighting a ticket salesman who refused to sell him steamship tickets on racial grounds. (1947, 2003: 143)

11 When I visited Kent, Andrew Klevan pointed out that smoking would provide another fruitful point of comparison between the two films.

Chapter 2

1 Brecht's *verfremdungseffekt* 'is itself a translation of the Russian critic Viktor Shklovskij's phrase 'Priem Ostrannenija', or 'device for making strange' (Willet 1974: 99).

2 The script suggests that Quick Mike's eyes are "inflamed with whiskey" when he attacks Delilah.

3 That the town itself is called Big Whiskey corresponds the extent to which it becomes a battleground for different men and competing definitions of masculinity. The absence of settled women – and families – gives us a hollow picture of 'civilisation', bearing few of the positive values conventionally associated with it.

Chapter 3

1 *Lured* is also known as *Personal Column*, the name changed part way through its run in the United States, to the detriment of the takings according to Sirk. (Halliday 1971, 1997 :84, 153)

2 The exceptions are the shot which match cuts from the close-up, shot 2, the only cut to break the alternating cross cutting between office and bar, and shot 6 which is the same set up as shot 4, and shot 12 which is the same as 10.

3 In saying to Wilde, later in our scene, 'Let's take a look at the pretty little girls in their dancing shoes', Fleming even speaks the same language as Pickering, if sardonically.

4 Sanders is one of the film's stars, so it is unlikely that he is going to be a minor figure. Perhaps this also makes it unlikely that he is going to be the murderer, but he had more of a reputation for playing roguish, and often rather ruthless, character parts than for romantic leads (*Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1939), *Summer Storm* (Douglas Sirk, 1944)), and it would be difficult to think of an introduction that more effectively established a character as 'an unmitigated cad'.

5 There are also elements like the comic motif around Barrett's crossword which move the film in this direction.

6 The terms I am employing here come from the critical framework set out by Michael Walker (1982a).

7 The three writers credited on *Pièges* are also credited on *Lured* – 'from a story by...' – while the screenplay credit is reserved for Leo Rosten.

8 A historian of the effect of the Motion Production Picture Code could make a profitable comparison of certain sequences in each film, as a way of establishing what was acceptable on the French screen in 1939 and what on the American in 1947. The scene in the heroine's bedroom with Maxime/Maxwell is a case in point, as is the fact that in *Pièges* Fleury initially asks Adrienne to be his mistress and they only become engaged after her violent response.

9 It seems to me that there is one special sequence in the original. That is the equivalent to the scene with van Druten, where Adrienne Charpentier encounters a designer called Pears. Differences in the way the scene is organised and played contribute to a very different tone: there are no dummies or pug dogs in the audience for the fashion show, just empty seats; Adrienne has actually heard of Pears, which immediately gives greater credibility to the deluded designer; he has (better) reason to consider Adrienne an industrial spy, as he sees her communicating with her police tail from the window. The sequence does not end with Pears being tumbled into the dustbins by the equivalent of Barrett, instead he locks himself and Adrienne into a room containing all the clothes he has designed and starts a conflagration: our last view of the sequence is Adrienne apparently succumbing to smoke inhalation. Above all, it has one of those extraordinarily poignant performances by Eric von Stroheim in his portrayal of Pears.

Chapter 4

1 It seems a deliberate decision to frame this shot within the frame of the photograph: earlier in the sequence, when Marco had been standing nearer the wall on which it hangs, we had seen the whole photograph, some of the wall, and the nearby standard lamp.

2 This description owes something to Steve Neale's discussion of the 'relay' of looks, as well as to Mulvey's original phrasing (1980: 57).

3 Given the emphasis on partial or restricted viewpoint, one of the questions which the film provokes through its complicated structure of flashbacks and inserted narratives, and in its focus on characters who are unconscious yet to whom feelings are attributed, is whether the flashbacks and recounted narratives in the film can be trusted as objective accounts, or whether they are partial, shaped by the tellers in ways which belie the conventions of flashback narration? Having spent some time thinking about this, my conclusion is that the flashbacks and inserted narratives are

as reliable as the main body of the narration. Even Marco's recollection of the evening when he and Lydia heard Caetano Veloso sing, which is the film suggests may be a dream and which does not receive the imprimatur of a title, clearly gives us perspectives broader than those of the character to whom the flashback is (at least partially) tied. The other flashbacks identified as belonging to particular characters share the same qualities of balance in the construction of point of view, and the same potential to challenge our preconceptions, that characterise the rest of the film.

4 Both of these examples appear in chapter three of *Ways of Seeing* (1972), where John Berger uses them to discuss the nude as a tradition of painting designed to gratify a male spectator.

5 This shot follows an earlier one in which the camera was on other side of the partition and the effect of the reflections exactly the reverse, where Benigno also does most, but not all on this occasion, of the talking. It does not have quite such an immediately interpretable effect, but it does appear in the context of a number of other elements – the highly symmetrical framing and reverse-field cutting throughout the conversation, the similarity through contrast of the red (Marco) and blue (Benigno) tops that the men wear, the broader narrative parallels discussed earlier in the chapter – which collectively suggest a relationship between the two. The psychoanalytic reading – see below – might also take these compositions as evoking a more general failure by Benigno to distinguish between himself and others.

6 *Vertigo* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1958), too, is about what living by a limited perspective can lead to, but the destructive consequences are there even more nakedly revealed.

Chapter 5

1 It is certainly an invention of the film. Clive Barker's short story *The Forbidden*, on which *Candyman* is based, has an interest in architecture, and makes some comparisons between the quadrangles of the Spector Street estate (the story is set in Liverpool) and the carpeted corridors of the University. But although there is some emphasis on the way in which the architects (who live in Georgian townhouses in another part of the city) and the planners have left the estate to its own devices, the sense of a vital connection between two worlds which is such a strength of the film, is not developed.

2 The long shot which shows Jake leading Helen past the bonfire, on the occasion of her second visit, appears to have been shot further south than Cabrini-Green and included by means of 'creative geography', such is the desire to show bonfire, wasteland and skyline simultaneously.

3 Each of these images are constructed using point source lighting to create prominent 'eyelights' – and this is picked up in the painting, where highlights to the eyes are part of the composition.

4 A photograph of Helen in front of a Mayan pyramid is prominent next to the unanswered telephone when she leaves a message with her one call. From this moment on she is increasingly part of the phenomena her earlier self would have sought to capture and document.

5 This also happens with the new mural of Helen in the last shot of the film, providing its closing image. It is worth recalling, too, that at its beginning, the film had dissolved from a view of the Chicago skyline to a close-up of Helen's face, her eyes prominent, just after we heard Candyman's voice intone the words 'I came for you.'

6 A handful of frames of the graffiti painting and the flash of Helen's camera are often cut into subsequent sequences creating a percussive effect, particularly when Candyman communicates with Helen.

7 While writing up these observations about *Candyman*, I encountered two other accounts of the film, one published in *CineAction* (Kydd 1995) and one in *Camera Obscura* (Briefel & Ngai 1996). They discuss some of the same elements that have been important to this chapter, but their arguments have different emphases and work toward rather different conclusions.

8 Like *Imitation of Life*, *Candyman* also closes with an unexpected show of respect at a funeral. At Helen's funeral Trevor, Purcell, Stacey and Archie Walsh are surprised to see a procession of mourners from Cabrini-Green making their way across the cemetery to pay tribute. It is Archie Walsh – a bit part played by the director – who notices the approach of Jake, Anne-Marie and the others. Archie also makes an appearance in the restaurant scene, playing an unspeaking member of the academic dinner party. These appearances by the architect of *Candyman* acknowledge Bernard Rose's own limited perspective in relation to the world of the real Cabrini-Green, but claim slightly greater farsightedness than Trevor or Purcell.

Bibliography

- Bacher, L. (1996) *Max Ophuls in the Hollywood Studios*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Barker, C. (1986, 2001) *In The Flesh*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Barr, C. (1999) *English Hitchcock*. Moffat: Cameron & Hollis.
- Berger, J. (1972) *Ways of Seeing*. Harmondsworth, London: BBC and Penguin.
- Brecht, B. (1979) *The Threepenny Opera*. London: Methuen. Translated and edited by Ralph Manheim and John Willett.
- Briefel, A & S. Ngai (1996) "How much did you pay for this place?": Fear, Entitlement, and Urban Space in Bernard Rose's *Candyman*, *Camera Obscura*, 37, 70–91.
- Britton, A. (1976) 'The Family in *The Reckless Moment*', *Framework*, 4, 21–4.
- Cavell, S. (1979) *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Enlarged edition) Cambridge MA, London: Harvard UP.
- Cawelti, J. (1979, 1995) 'Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films' in Grant, B. *Film Genre Reader II* (Austin: Texas University Press), pp. 227–45.
- Cawelti, J. (1970) *The Six-gun Mystique* (Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press).
- Cawelti J. (1999) *The Six-gun Mystique Sequel* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Popular Press).
- Elsaesser, T. (1972) 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', *Monogram*, 4, 2–15.
- Gallafent, E. (1994). *Clint Eastwood: Filmmaker and Star*. New York: Continuum.
- Gibbs, J. (2002) *Mise-en-scène: Film Style and Interpretation*. London: Wallflower.
- Halliday, J. (1971, 1997) *Sirk on Sirk*. London: Faber.
- Holding, E. S. (1947, 2003) *The Blank Wall*. London: Persephone.
- Kydd, E. (1995) "Guess Who Else is Coming to Dinner: Racial Sexual hysteria in *Candyman*", *CineAction*, 36, 63–72.
- Matthews, P. (2001) 'The Deep End', *Sight and Sound*, 11:11 (NS), 43–4.
- Mulvey, L. (1975) 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 16: 3, 6–18.
- Neale, S. (1980) *Genre*. London: BFI.
- Perkins, V. F. (1981) 'Moments of Choice', *The Movie*, 58, 1141–5. (Reprinted in Lloyd, A, (ed.) (1982) *Movies of the Fifties*. London: Orbis Publishing, 209–13.)
- Perkins, V. F. (1990) Film Authorship: The Premature Burial, *CineAction!*, 21/22, 57–64.
- Pumphrey, M. 'Why do Cowboys wear their hats in the bath?: Style politics for the older man.' in Cameron, I. & Pye, D., eds, (1996). *The Movie Book of the Western*. London: Studio Vista, pp. 50–62
- Pye, D. (2000) 'Movies and Point of View', *Movie*, 36, 2–34.
- Thomas, D. (2000) *Beyond Genre*. Moffat: Cameron & Hollis.
- Thompson, J. O. (1978) "Screen Acting and the Commutation Test", *Screen*, 19: 2, 55–69.
- Thomson, D. (2002) *The New Biographical Dictionary of Film*. (London: Little, Brown).
- Walker, M. (1982) 'Melodrama and the American Cinema', *Movie*, 29/30, 2–38.
- Walker, M. (1982b) 'Ophuls in Hollywood', *Movie*, 29/30, 39–60.
- Willett, J (ed.) (1974) *Brecht on Theatre* (London: Methuen).
- Wood, R. (1976) *Personal Views*. London: Gordon Fraser.
- Wood, R. (1986). *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Wood, R. (2002) 'Plunging off The Deep End into The Reckless Moment', *CineAction*, 59, 14–19.